

NVMEN

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International Review for the History of Religions

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## The Divine Essence, that Inaccessible *Kabod* Enthroned in Heaven: Nazianzen's *Oratio* 28,3 and the Tradition of Apophatic Theology from Symbols to Philosophical Concepts

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### Abstract

In his second theological oration (*Oratio* 28,3), Gregory Nazianzen equates the divine glory (*kabod*) of the Holy of Holies with the divine essence and asserts their inaccessible character. An investigation into the meaning of these two terms unveils their origins in two distinct traditions, the former tracing its roots back to the ancient Semitic symbolisms of the forbidden divine glory and throne, the latter to the Hellenistic philosophical conception of an immaterial and incomprehensible divinity. The thesis advanced in this study is that these two different languages represent two semiotic forms of apophaticism, one expressed through the *mysterium tremendum* inspiring symbols and images of fire, dazzling glory and enigmatic heavenly creatures, guardians of the enthroned *kabod*, the other through negative philosophical terminologies. The identity of the two semiotic forms is established at the end of an investigation that concludes with the observation that Hellenistic theologians developed their apophatic discourses mostly in the context of interpreting biblical reports on the theophanies of the divine and unapproachable enthroned *kabod*. It was in this hermeneutical context that they “translated” the symbols of interdiction into philosophical negative concepts.

### Keywords

apophaticism, *kabod*, divine essence, symbols, concepts

## Introduction: Nazianzen's Text and Its Twofold Background

In his second theological discourse, *Oratio* 28,3, a passage incorporating a theorization about the incomprehensibility of the divine essence, Gregory Nazianzen identifies the divine essence with the biblical *kabod*:

What experience of this have I had, you friends of truth, her initiates (*mystai*), her lovers (*synerastai*) as I am? I was running with a mind to see God and so it was that I ascended the mount (*anēlthon epi to oros*). I penetrated the cloud (*ten nephelēn dieschon*), became enclosed in it, detached from matter and material things and concentrated, so far as might be, in myself (*eis emauton hōs hoion te systrapheis*). But when I directed my gaze (*proseblepsa*) I scarcely saw (*eidon*) the averted figure (*ta opisthia*) of God, and this whilst sheltering in the rock (*tē petra*), God the word incarnate for us. Peering in (*mikron diakypsas*) I saw not the nature prime (*ten prōtēn te kai akēraton physin*), self-apprehended (*heautē ginōskomenēn*) (by “self” I mean the Trinity), the nature as it abides within the first veil (*tou prōtou katapetasmatos eisō menei*) and is hidden by the Cherubim (*hypo tōn cheroubim sygkalypsetai*), but as it reaches us (*eis hemas phthanousa*) at its furthest remove from God, being, so far as I can understand, the grandeur (*megaleiotēs*), or as divine David calls it the “majesty” (*megaloprepeia*) inherent in the created things he has brought forth and governs. (Norris 1991:225; Gr. text: Gallay 1978)

Two ideas seem to be emblematic within the text. First, Gregory's exposition represents the account of a visionary's experience which follows the features of the Jewish-Christian mystical tradition of the divine ascent: a preliminary ascetical preparation for the encounter with God is followed by ascension and the whole process reaches its fulfillment in the vision of God, the theophany of the divine glory. Second, the visionary who is allowed to enter the divine temple does not experience unlimited access to every element of the temple. A particular celestial item still remains concealed in mystery and under the strictest exclusion to the visionary's access. It is the divine glory (*kabod* [MT]/*doxa* [LXX]) which in its manifestation still remains enveloped in a mystery of interdiction.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, the passage asserts a dimension of

<sup>1</sup> Several scholars argue that the main theophanic traditions of ancient Israel took two forms, depending on the nature of God's manifestation either as glory or as name; see Trygve Mettinger's classical distinction between *shem* (name) and *kabod* (glory) theologies (Mettinger 1982b) and Brueggemann's similar distinction between the Priestly theology of glory and the Deuteronomical theology of name (Brueggemann 2005:670–674). One may maintain that a certain apophaticism is intrinsic to the theology of the

divine concealment echoing both Exod 25,20 and 37,9 (which affirm that the divine *kabod/doxa* is situated beneath the wings of the cherubim) and 1 Kgs 8,7, according to which the cherubs cover the ark in Solomon's temple. On the other hand, the passage asserts a dimension of divine manifestation and recalls the concept of *megaloprepeia* in connection with David.<sup>2</sup>

However, Gregory's discourse unveils further layers of complexity, as the oration is usually read as expressing the Cappadocian doctrine regarding the incomprehensibility of the divine essence or substance. Gregory, therefore, instills the Greek philosophical idea of divine incomprehensibility within the mystical and visionary context of a theophany. Thus, one of the main hypotheses I propose in this study is that philosophical apophatic discourse emerged in the context of theophanic hermeneutics and in connection with the Second Temple tradition of the forbidden element of mystical experiences. Nazianzen's passage offers a sound textual ground for this idea and shows as well that apophatic discourse undergoes a change from imagery and symbolic forms to concepts and Greek philosophical terminology.

On the one hand, therefore, Nazianzen's text harks back to the old Jewish apocalyptic writings, whether biblical or extra-biblical, which develop the theme of the inaccessible divine glory seated on the sacred throne of the Holy of Holies.<sup>3</sup> My article advances the idea that Jewish and Christian visionary traditions conceived of a forbidden sacred object and usually identified it with the heavenly enthroned glory. Since

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divine name, which presupposes, as Brueggemann points out, that "Yahweh's 'name' (which in some sense is Yahweh's self) is there [in the Temple], but Yahweh's full self is elsewhere, in heaven, beyond the ideological arrangements of Israel" (Brueggemann 2005:672). However, glory theology is primarily important for the economy of this article, as long as it reflects both a dimension of divine manifestation as heavenly light and a dimension of divine concealment which leads from an apophatic theology expressed through symbols to an apophatic theology through philosophical concepts.

<sup>2)</sup> The book of Psalms employs this term for denoting the majesty above the heavens (Ps 8,3), its dwelling over Israel (Ps 68,34) or within the temple (Ps 96,6), and claims that this majesty characterizes God's works (Ps 111,3) and his glory (*doxa*, Ps 145,5).

<sup>3)</sup> For a general perspective on the image of the divine throne, see Metzger 1985 (ancient Near East), Philonenko 1993 (from ancient Iran to rabbinic perspectives) and Eskola 2001 (New Testament and early Christianity).

the language was predominantly, if not exclusively, symbolic, one might characterize this discourse as *apophatic theology through symbols*.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, Nazianzen's text belongs to the Hellenized Jewish-Christian tradition and construes an *apophatic theological discourse through Greek philosophical concepts*. My research hypothesizes that some of the most illustrious representatives of this tradition — Philo, the Valentinians, Irenaeus, Clement, Origen and Gregory — developed

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<sup>4</sup> In one of her studies, Janet Soskice brings forward the following insight about the inaccessible dimension of the divine expressed through symbols: "Long before Hellenization, the God of Israel was known as a Deity beyond human conceiving. The proliferation of imagery used by Prophets and Psalmists to denote the God of Israel is evidence, surely, not of a failure to discriminate between language literally appropriate or inappropriate to God, but to the realization that no image could be adequate to 'I AM WHO I AM'" (Exod 3,14; Soskice 1985:77). In his research on the meaning of the divine names, Mettinger concludes that the divine names are symbols and the "inventory of symbols changed from time to time in a continuous dialogue with the challenges of experience" (1988:203). However, he adds: "God is above and beyond; the images and symbols should remain what they are: not solid prison walls, but the fragile stained-glass windows of transcendence" (1988:207). Cf. "in sacredness God will remain unfathomable" (1988:11). However, my research investigates a different aspect of the biblical apophatic discourse through symbols. While Soskice and Mettinger pointed out the divine names, I will primarily emphasize the forbidden object of the sacred realm, the divine *kabod*. Nevertheless, one should mention Silviu Bunta's remarkable study according to which the *kabod* tradition manifested two opposite sub-traditions. While both of them accept the idea of human transformation into a glorious being, the first is more ancient (however still occurring in a few texts of the late Second Temple) and admits complete human transformation into a god, the second rejects human transformation into a god and leaves room only for human transformation into a godlike figure, the image of God (Bunta forthcoming). Obviously, while the former was connected with polytheistic religious forms, the later was shaped within a monotheistic context and became the main stream of the Second Temple. I suppose that philosophical apophatic theology appeared in this second context, though apophatic theology emerged in primitive forms in the ancient Near East (and possibly other areas of the world, e.g. India [Chethimattam 1981]). As one can further see in this paper, apophatic theology in the ancient Near East took various shapes — such as a rejection of access to immortality and divine wisdom (Mettinger 2007:60–64), terrifying guardians impending the dethronement of the heavenly king, *shem* theology, interdiction to pronounce the divine Name or interdiction of any divine figuration — and eventually evolved into refined philosophical forms regarding the impossibility to comprehend or express the divine, therefore into positions professing divine incognoscibility and ineffability.

it within the exegetical context of the Old Testament theophanies. Gregory's text is emblematic as long as it sets in connection and identifies the central elements of the two traditions, namely their forbidden objects, the *kabod* and the divine essence.

## **The Ancient Tradition of the Forbidden Enthroned *Kabod*: Apophatic Theology through Symbols and Images**

### *1. The Ancient Near East: Forbidden Sacred Objects and Fearful Guardians*

Perhaps the most noticeable way in which the biblical reports of mystical experiences convey the idea of inaccessibility is through the usage of such motifs as terrifying guardian creatures or natural elements as fire, dazzling light, clouds and veils. The image of the tree of life guarded by a serpent or monstrous being was widespread in the ancient Near East. Anthropomorphic figures, for example, sometimes winged men used to stand for the divine mediators of the Sumerian culture.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, such divine creatures as the terrifying guardians of various forbidden objects were portrayed as monsters in the form of human-headed animals such as goats, cows, bulls, lions, gryphons or eagles.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Langdon mentions a bas-relief of Ur-Nammu of Ur that portrays a winged messenger holding a jar of overflowing water (Langdon 1964:96, fig. 49). See also Trinquet (1957), de Vaux (1961) and Metzger (1985).

<sup>6</sup> Item ND 11035 of the Iraq Museum represents two pharaoh figures facing a sacred tree as guardians (Oates 2001:171). The Ninurta Temple had two guardian figures similar to the winged lions with human head that used to guard the palace of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) at Kalhu (Oates 2001:7). Sometimes palaces are also provided with guardian figures (McIntosh 2005:28). This is also similar to the two winged bull colossi guarding the entrance to the palace of Sargon II (721–705 BCE) at Khorsabad. Behind the bull there is the representation of a winged protective deity with a bucket and cone (Nemet-Nejat 1998:209). The Metropolitan Museum of Art has also an alabaster relief from room S of the palace of Nimrud, representing two eagle-headed genii facing a sacred tree (Oates 2001:55). The motif seems to have been so popular that even one of the gates at Dur-Sharukin, the capital of Assyria built by Sargon in 717 BCE, has a winged god with a bucket and cone (Roaf 1990:184). There is also a solid bronze figurine of a winged bull centaur, most likely part of an ancient throne from the ancient kingdom of Urartu, 9th–7th c. BCE (Roaf 1990:170).

For instance, the *Tablet* III iii,18–20 or III v,16–17 from the epic of Gilgamesh and Huwawa (or Humbaba, for the Assyrian versions) narrates how Gilgamesh and Enkidu fight and slay Huwawa, the guardian of the Cedar Forests, who was portrayed in these lines: “his roaring is the flood-storm, his mouth is fire, his breath is death” (Speiser 1969:79–80). In the Mesopotamian story of Etana, this legendary king of Kish receives help from a miraculous eagle and ascends to heaven, where he undergoes the test of fighting a serpent in order to obtain the plant of life from the god Anu (Pritchard 1969:114–118). Likewise, the story of Adapa narrates the episode of the hero’s encounter with two heavenly guardians, Tammuz and Gizzida, at the gate of Anu (Pritchard 1969:101). Yet, the motif of the divine guardians is not unknown to Greek mythology, since Hercules and Jason meet monstrous beings defending the forbidden gardens of Hesperides or the golden fleece of Kolchis.

Besides all these mythological examples, the kings of Egypt, Mesopotamia or other ancient cultures — envisioned as gods on earth or at least their images — used to surround their thrones with sculptures or bas-reliefs with representations of mythical guardian creatures.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the image of the frightening guardians of the throne, a species of inaccessible sacred object, was almost omnipresent in the ancient Near East and Greece. The focal point of this imagery consisted of the inaccessible throne and the divine or terrestrial overlord who sits on that throne surrounded by glory. The numinous element, part of a widespread solar imagery, always appears to be linked to a *mysterium tremen-*

<sup>7</sup> “The Mesopotamian king was considered the gods’ representative on earth. An Akkadian proverb provided the metaphor: *Man is the shadow of a god, and a slave is the shadow of a man; but the king is the mirror of a god*. . . . Unlike the Egyptian pharaohs, who were regarded as gods, the kings in Babylonia and Assyria were usually considered mortals. In exceptional cases, certain kings had themselves divinized. Cultic structures similar to those of the traditional gods were built for some kings” (Nemet-Nejat 1998:217). Most likely, Nemet-Nejat makes reference to Shulgi, the second and greatest king of the Ur III dynasty, 2094–2047 BCE. See also McIntosh’s opinion: “The Ur III rulers expressed their authority in traditional terms, the king controlling city-states on behalf of the gods and standing between them and the people of the land — the accepted role of the city-state’s ruler writ large, the whole empire being the estate administered by the king. The relationship between the ruler and the gods became closer when Shulgi proclaimed himself a god. Temples to his cult were maintained in every city” (McIntosh 2005:81). Cf. Metzger (1985).

*dum et fascinans* (e.g. Otto 1947). Socially, the whole imagery of the forbidden throne reflects a royal vocabulary and reveals a theological development in a royal socio-cultural context. However, phenomenologically, the divinity makes itself manifest, invites to worship and communion and, at the same time, manifests an obvious element of inaccessibility. The dichotomy hidden-manifest traces its roots back here, in the ancient times when it was expressed through a language of symbols. Yet, this dichotomy will remain an essential feature of apophatic theology even in the Hellenistic era when Jewish and Christian thinkers will dress it in philosophical garments.

## 2. *The Forbidden Enthroned Kabod of the Hebrew Scripture*

As the cherubim play the role of guardians in Gen 3,24 and Ezek 28,14 and 16, the function may be also extended to the cherubs of the ark.<sup>8</sup> Several passages referring to the cherubs of the Tabernacle, the Temple of Solomon (with their faces turned towards the Temple entrance) or the Second Temple (facing each other) may leave sufficient room for the interpretation according to which they represent the guardians of the ark.<sup>9</sup> One may associate the observation that secondary heavenly beings usually perform a gesture of protection over divinities of primary order or such sacred objects as the tree of life (Keel 1977:21) with

<sup>8</sup> Immediately following the episode of the fall of Adam, Yahweh intends to guard the path to the tree of life and sets a guardian at the gate of Paradise, a terrifying cherub who bears a flaming sword that turns in every direction (*lht bh rbh hmtthpkhth*). The idea of guardianship present in Genesis and Ezekiel (*swkhkh*) is suggested by the *skhkhym* (protecting, overshadowing) wings of the cherubs in Exod 25,20. Furthermore, as several biblical scholars have shown the strong connections between the image of the garden of Paradise and that of the Temple (Weinfeld 1981:501–12; Levenson 1985:111–84), one may affirm that the tree of life plays, in the Genesis narrative, a function similar to that of the divine throne of the Temple: it represents the inaccessible object of the divine realm. The connection between the tree of paradise and the throne of Yahweh is also obvious in *1 En* 24,3–4, *1 En* 25,1–5, *2 En* 8,3 and *ApMos* 22,4. The idea seems to be even more ancient as it occurs in other Semitic cultures. The old descriptions of the temple built by Gudea in Lagash, for example, portray a cosmic tree at its gate and a sacred garden inside (Largement 1960:568).

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Exod 25,18–22 and 37,6–9; Num 7,88; 1 Sam 4,4; 1 Kgs 6 and 8; 1 Kgs 10,18–20; 2 Kgs 19,15; 1 Chr 13,6, 2 Chr 3,13.

the fact that Exod 25,20 and 37,9 affirm that the *kabod* is situated beneath the wings of the cherubim. Similarly, according to 1 Kgs 8,7, the cherubim perform this gesture of protection over the ark in Solomon's temple (Mettinger 1982b:116).<sup>10</sup> Hence, in addition to such functions as God's vehicle (Metzger 1985:309–367; an interpretation taking its point of departure in Ps 18,11) or heavenly hosts of Sabaoth (Mettinger 1982a and 1990:397–398, taking the point of departure from Ps 89,6–9, Isaiah 6 and the Canaanite ideas of the council of gods assembling at El's mountain dwelling), the cherubim of the two temples of Jerusalem may well be interpreted as guardians of the ark (Landsberger 1947:234; Parrot 1954:24; De Vaux 1961; Noth 1968; Cassuto 1983:335; Metzger 1993:510–512; Mettinger 1995:190). They are guardians and defenders of the sanctuary: “Wächter und Schützer des Heiligtums” (Noth 1968:124). The fact that heavenly creatures play the role of sacred guardians and most likely inspire fear (Landsberger 1947:232) actually sheds light on the sacred forbidden object the cherubim and the seraphim protect, namely the divine *kabod* which has to remain unapproachable in its nature. This function essentially unveils an apophatic discourse expressed through symbols.

A common feature of prophetic discourses, the inaccessible throne is the place where the enormous, magnificent and glorious image of Yahweh dwells guarded by heavenly creatures such as the cherubim and the seraphim.<sup>11</sup> The tension between the vision of the divine face and the idea of divine concealment represented a central feature, if not the most important, of biblical theology. The ancient Jewish polemics concerning divine concealment and revelation, hiddenness and manifestation prove it sufficiently.<sup>12</sup> Yahweh's manifestations are not complete, but

<sup>10</sup> See note 8. It is noteworthy that several Christian authors preserved the remarkable exegetical tradition of Isa 6,2 according to which the two seraphim cover the body of God (see further the subchapter on Origen).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Isa 6,2, Ps 47,8, Jer 14,21, Ezek 1,26 and 10,1 (*ks'*) or Daniel 7 (*krs'*); cf. Metzger (1985) or McCormick (2006:175–186). Under the name of *merkabah* (the chariot-throne), the throne will become the main target of the later apocalyptic journeys and its location the heavenly Temple (see, for instance, Gruenwald 1980).

<sup>12</sup> See Isa 6,5: “Then I said, ‘Woe is me! I am doomed, for my own eyes have seen the King, Lord of Hosts, I, a man of unclean lips, I, who dwell among a people of unclean lips.’” Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations are from the Oxford Study Bible. See also Exod 33,20 and Exod 3,6: “Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at



fractional and curtailed, camouflaged by cherubs and seraphs, clouds, smoke and flaming fire, and the realm beyond all these elements of concealment remains intangible.<sup>13</sup> The image of Yahweh's throne surrounded by seraphim as guarding creatures appears in Isa 6,1–2 in the following manner:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord seated on a throne (*ks'*), high and exalted, and the skirt of his robe filled the temple. Seraphim were in attendance of him. Each had six wings: with one pair of wings they covered their faces and with another their bodies, and with the third pair they flew.

In Ezek 1,4–10, the guardians are cherubim:

In my vision I saw a storm-wind (*rwḥ š'rḥ*) coming from the north, a vast cloud (*'m*) with flashes of fire (*š*) and brilliant light (*ngh*) about it; and within was a radiance like brass, glowing in the heart of the flames. In the fire was the likeness of four living creatures (*hywḥt*) in human form. Each had four faces and each four wings; their legs were straight, and their hoofs were like the hoofs of a calf, glistening and gleaming like bronze. Under the wings on each of the four sides were human hands; all four creatures had faces and wings, and the wings of one touched those of another. They did not turn as they moved; each creature went straight forward. This is what their faces were like: all four had a human face and a lion's face on the right, on the left the face of an ox and the face of an eagle. . . . 26–28: Above the vault over their [the living creatures'] heads there appeared, as it were, a sapphire in the shape of a throne (*ks'*), and exalted on the throne (*ks'*) a form in human likeness (*dmwṯ kmr'h 'dḥm*). From his waist upwards I saw what might have been brass glowing like fire (*š*) in a furnace; and from his waist downwards I saw what looked like fire (*š*). Radiance (*ngh*) encircled him. Like a rainbow in

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God.” Cf. Ezek 1,27. See Mettinger (1982b) for the idea that *kabod* theologies emphasize Yahweh's manifestation as glory (*kabod*), and that it was primarily developed in priestly milieus. In opposition to this maximalist position about God's manifestation, *name* (*shem*) theology — developed in scribal environments — was more reserved and primarily underlined Yahweh's non-visual manifestations. Balentine concludes in this way his study on the hiddenness of Yahweh: “What calls for chief mention here is that fact that the experience of God's hiddenness, just as the experience of his presence, is an integral part of Israelite faith. Both experiences derive from the nature of God himself. He is both hidden and present, both near and far way” (Balentine 1983:172; cf. 175).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, some of the most ancient texts, Isa 4,5; 6,1–2; 14,13–14.

the clouds after the rain was the sight of that encircling radiance (*ngh shyb*); it was like the appearance of the glory of the Lord (*kbbwdh yhw*).<sup>14</sup>

The book of Ezekiel proposes even a new depiction of the throne, now provided with wheels, an image later called the *merkabah*, the chariot-throne.

The Hebrew Bible also exhibits other types of forbidden objects, such as the fire of God,<sup>15</sup> the name of God (*šm*; Exod 6,3), the face of God (*pny*; Exod 33,20), Mount Horeb (Exod 3,5) or the untouchable ark of the covenant (2 Sam 6,6–7: *ʿrwn*). Generally, the dichotomy “hidden vs. manifest” seems to represent a pivotal feature of the holy writ. Usually expressed by two connected symbols — “cloud” vs. *kabod*, “smoke” vs. *kabod*, *shem* vs. *kabod*, God’s “face” vs. hidden God, etc. — the structure denotes at the same time the divine concealment and various degrees of divine manifestation.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, there is an emblematic distinction between God’s hidden dimension and his various modalities of manifestation in the visible world. In order to express this distinction, ancient writers employed their “primitive” but technical symbolic languages.

### 3. *Apocalyptic Literature and the Idea of Forbidden Glory*

Although initiating a new method or practice of accessing the divine temple, the vast corpus of apocalyptic literature still preserves the image of the throne of Yahweh as the unapproachable object *par excellence*. Marta Himmelfarb observes that, dissimilar to prophetic writings, apocalyptic literature highlights ascension as the key method of access to the divine temple, Enoch being the first character of Jewish literature to ascend to heaven.<sup>17</sup> Unlike Enoch and many other apocalyptic

<sup>14</sup> See also the similar four great beasts which Daniel sees before the Ancient of Days in Dan 7,2–10.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Exod 3,2–6, Moses’ vision on Sinai or any prophetic vision; cf. Lk 12,49; Acts 2,3.

<sup>16</sup> For the Hebrew Scriptures, see for example Lewis (1972), Neher (1972), Balentine (1983), Perdue (2000), Fiddes (2002), Richter (2002), Brueggemann (2005:333–407). For the New Testament, see Rouquette (1971). For the rabbinic period, see Schäfer (1991). For a methodological perspective, see Ricoeur (1977).

<sup>17</sup> In one of her books, Himmelfarb affirms: “The first ascent to heaven in Jewish lit-

visionaries, the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel do not ascend to heaven in order to attain their *visio Dei*. To the contrary, Enoch experiences an ascension to heaven, is transported to the Garden of God — now in a grandiose remake after the book of Genesis — and contemplates both the “mouth of the rivers” mentioned in Genesis (the water source of all rivers of the world) and the origins of the winds (*1 En* 17,4–18,5). Nevertheless, the forbidden object still remains the heavenly throne, as one can see in *1 En* 14,18–22, a passage explaining that Enoch and the angels cannot look at the glorious face of the divine figure encircled by flaming fire:<sup>18</sup>

And I was looking and I saw a lofty throne; and its appearance was like ice, and its wheels were like the shining sun, and the voice (or sound) of the cherubim, and from beneath the throne issued rivers of flaming fire. And I was unable to see. The Great Glory sat upon it; his apparel was like the appearance of the sun and whiter than much snow. No angel could enter into this house and look at his face because of the splendor and glory, and no human could look at him. Flaming fire encircled him and a great fire stood by him, and none of those about him approached him. (Nickelsburg and Vanderkam 2004:35)

An interesting theological feature consists of the psychological state which the vision of the divine figure produces within the visionary. It is the *tremendum* experienced at the vision of the celestial fire, which secures the impenetrability of the lofty throne of glory and generates fear and awe. It may be observed in *1 En.* 14,13–14: “And I went into that house — hot as fire and cold as snow, and no delight of life was in it. Fear enveloped me, and trembling sized me, and I was quaking and trembling, and I fell upon my face” (Nickelsburg and Vanderkam 2004:35).<sup>19</sup>

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erature appears in a third-century BCE apocalypse that has as its hero the biblical patriarch Enoch” (Himmelfarb 1986:145). She also adds: “But *1 Enoch* 14 departs from the pattern of *Ezekiel* 1 in one particularly significant way. Ezekiel is the only one of all the classical prophets to record the experience of being physically transported by the spirit of God (*Ezek* 3,12; 8,3; 11,24; 40,1–2), but even Ezekiel does not ascend to heaven. The throne of God comes to him while he is standing by the river Kebar (*Ezek* 1,3). Enoch’s is the first ascent in Jewish literature” (Himmelfarb 1986: 150). See also Collins (1984), Collins and Fishbane (1995) and Carmignac (1989).

<sup>18)</sup> Cf. *2 En* 22,1–4, *4 Ezra* 8,21–22 or *LadJac* 2,7.

<sup>19)</sup> Another apocalyptic text, the famous passage from *Dan* 7,2–10, also displays the

#### 4. *The Forbidden Kabod of the New Testament*

The theme of the forbidden object is also encountered in the New Testament, for example in the episode of the Transfiguration. While climbing Mount Tabor, Jesus guides and initiates his disciples into a spiritual ascension which ends with the vision of the Son of Man in glory.<sup>20</sup> The text also mentions two perhaps frightening elements which accompany the revelation event — the cloud of light and the divine voice (Matt 17,1–5). The element which proves the existence of a *tremendum* and of a sacred forbidden object, an element usually encountered in biblical theophanies, is the disciples' complete prostration on their faces (Matt 17,6). This act is an *imitatio* of the ancient prophetic gesture made at the moment when the visionary undertakes the experience of a divine manifestation, a theophany.<sup>21</sup> The same gesture of prostration also occurs in the book of Revelation and most likely it is the sign that the visionary experiences a terrifying fear, a *mysterium tremendum*. The account of the visionary is illustrative:

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though I were dead man (*epesa pros tous podas autou hōs nekros*). But he laid his right hand on me and said, 'Do not be afraid (*Mē phobou*). I am the first and the last, I am the living One' (Rev 1,17).

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images of certain fearful creatures, four great beasts (*hywth*), right before the appearance of God seated on a throne of flaming fire. For the idea that the vision of the heavenly throne represents a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, see also 4 Ezra 8,21–22 (“[Y]our throne is beyond imagining, your glory past conceiving; you are attended by the host of angels, trembling as they turn themselves into wind or fire at your bidding”) and Adam’s vision in *Vita* 25,2–3: “After your mother and I had been driven out of Paradise, while we were praying, Michael the archangel and messenger of God came to me. And I saw a chariot (*currum*) like the wind and its wheels (*rotae*) were fiery. I was carried off into the Paradise of righteousness, and I saw the LORD sitting and his appearance (*aspectus*) was unbearable flaming fire (*ignis incendens intolerabilis*)” (Johnson 1983:267–8).

<sup>20</sup> For the early Christian conceptions of Jesus as the Son of Man enthroned in glory as the heavenly King, see Eskola (2001).

<sup>21</sup> The same gesture occurs in the following theophanic moments: Gen 18,2 (Abraham in front of the three visitors at the oak of Mamvri), the Israelites in Exod 33,10; cf. Ezek 1,28 and 43,3; 1 En 14,14; Dan 8,18 and 10,15; *ApZeph* 6,4–7 and 13–15; *LAE* 26,1; and Rev 1,17.

Among the many visions of the New Testament, Rev 4,6 reports the epiphany of the four guardian creatures in a curious arrangement which disguises the divine throne, namely “in the center, round the throne itself.”<sup>22</sup> Again, the image of the guardian beasts appears connected to, covering and protecting the forbidden heavenly throne and the divine figure seated on the throne. As a witness for the persistence of the biblical image of the guarded throne in early Christian writings, the acts narrating the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas, chapter 12, are one of many examples of this kind. There, Saturus, one of the martyrs, has this vision of the martyrs’ ascent to the divine throne:

Then we came to a place (*locum*) whose walls seemed to be constructed of light (*de luce*). And in front of the gate stood four angels (*ante ostium loci illius angeli quatuor stabant*), who entered in and put on white robes. We also entered and we heard the sound of voices in unison chanting endlessly: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy!’ In the same place we seemed to see an aged man (*sedentem quasi hominem canum*) with white hair and a youthful face (*uultu iuuenili*), though we did not see his feet (*cuius pedes non uidemus*). On his right and left were four elders (*seniores*), and behind them stood other aged men (*seniores complures stabant*). Surprised (*cum admiratione*), we entered (*introeuntes*) and stood (*stetimus*) before a throne (*ante thronum*): four angels lifted us up and we kissed the aged man and he touched our faces with his hand. (Musurillo 2000:121)

### **From the Forbidden *Kabod* to the Incomprehensible Divine Essence: Apophatic Theology through Philosophical Negative Concepts**

Hellenistic culture gradually imposed a philosophical translation of the idea of divine inaccessibility. In this way, apophatic theology changed its symbolic expression for philosophical concepts. The fact that Hellenistic Jewish and Christian theologians articulated their apophatic theologies in the context of interpreting the theophanies of the biblical and extra-biblical texts, especially the account of Moses’ vision on Mount Sinai, is a strong argument for this translation and an explanation of the way it took place.

<sup>22</sup> See also Rev 4,6: “In the center, round the throne (*en mesō tou thronou kai kyklō tou thronou*), were four living creatures...” This paradoxical image echoes Ezek 1,16 and 10,10: “like a wheel inside a wheel” (*h’wphn bthwdh h’wphn*).

### 1. *Philo*

While certain anti-anthropomorphic stances are already present in Aristobulus, Philo is the real initiator of the apophatic theology in its proper sense (Wolfson 1947:121–158 and Mühlenberg 1966:58–64). As eminent scholars such as Daniélou and Starobinski-Safran observed, Philo developed his apophatic terminologies several times within the exegetical context of biblical theophanies, for example the apparition of God to Moses or to Abraham (Starobinski-Safran 1978:55; Daniélou 1961:298–327). However, it is worth noting that Philo lives centuries after the *shem* vs. *kabod* polemics and makes use of both traditions in order to elaborate his apophatic discourse.<sup>23</sup> In *De Somniis* I 230, for instance, he makes the following statement:

Thus in another place, when he [Moses] had inquired whether He that is has any name (*ei esti ti tou ontos onoma*), he came to know full well that He has no proper name (*kyrion men ouden*), and that whatever name anyone may use of Him he will use by licence of language (*legesthai gar ou pephyken*); for it is not the nature of Him that is to be spoken of, but simply to be (*monon einai to on*). (Colson and Whitaker, *Philo* V, LCL 275:419)<sup>24</sup>

Instead of describing the dazzling light of God or asserting the impossibility of seeing the divine face, Philo affirms, on the one hand, that any predication is improper to God as long as God's essence (*ousia* or *physis*) is incomprehensible and no name can appropriately express it. While speculating on the meaning of the divine Name, the Alexandrian suggests that God cannot have names, but the Name, the sacred Tetragrammaton (YHWH) revealed in the theophany described in

<sup>23</sup> In *Conf* 146, for example, Philo calls the First-Born at the same time with *shem* vocabulary (*onoma theou kai logos*) and also with terminology particular to the *kabod* tradition: the “Man after His Image” (*ho kat' eikona anthrōpos*).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Mut* 7–15 (e.g. *Mut* 7,1–2: *mē mentoi nomisēs to on, ho esti pros alētheian on, hyp' anthrōpou tinos katalambanesthai*) and *Mos.* I 75: “there is no name that can properly be assigned to me (*ouden onoma to parapan ep' emou*)” (Yonge 2002:466); cf. Colson's translation: “no name at all can properly be used of Me” (Colson, *Philo* VI, LCL 289:315). It is worth noting that, in all these instances of negative theology, Philo explains to his reader the meaning of Moses' vision.

Exodus 3.<sup>25</sup> Philo also renders the ineffable YHWH through *ho ōn*, the One Who Is, and identifies it with the being itself (*to on*),<sup>26</sup> which is ineffable: *arrēton gar to on* (*Her* 170; cf. *Mut* 14). For Philo, “I am that I am” is rather a matter of existence than predication. It is “equivalent to saying, ‘It is my nature to be, not to be described by names (*‘egō eimi ho ōn*, *ison tō einai pephyka, ou legesthai* [*Mut* 11,3–4]).”<sup>27</sup> Unlike this concealed dimension of God, his external manifestation, his ek-stasis (*hyparxis*) or active power (*dynamis*), represents a knowable, accessible dimension.<sup>28</sup> Philo translates in this way, through the distinction *ousia-hyparxis*, the ancient biblical dichotomy between the hidden and the manifest dimensions of the divine.

## 2. Gnostics

Gnostic theologians as well have to be mentioned for their effort of expressing God through philosophical concepts. As in Philo’s case, they practice a mixed discourse, at the same time symbolic and conceptual (Morrison-Jones 2002: 138–46, 170). *A Valentinian Exposition* 24,36–25,39, for example, describes God as inconceivable and ineffable, and construes an apophatic discourse in connection with Temple theophanic imagery:

Thus it is he who revealed himself in Monogenes, and in him he revealed the Ineffable One (*patšēge araf*)...the Truth. [*They*] saw him [*dwelling*] in the Monad [*and*] in the Dyad [*and*] in the Tetrad. [*He*] first brought forth [*Monogenes*] [*and Limit (horos)*]. And Limit (*horos*) [is the separator] of the All [and the confirmation of the All], since they are...the hundred.... He is the [*Mind (nous)*]...the Son. [*He is*] completely [ineffable (*ouatšēge araf*)] to the All, and he is the

<sup>25</sup>) Exodus 3 recounts the story of Moses’ ascent on the mount Horeb, his vision of the burning bush and his dialogue with God about his Name, the moment in which God reveals his sacred Name, YHWH (Exod 3,14).

<sup>26</sup>) For the translation of the Tetragrammaton through *ho ōn*, see e.g. *Opif* 172; *Leg all* III 181; *Det* 160, *Mut* 11, *Mos* I 75. Cf. LXX: *Ego eimi ho ōn*. In fact, *ho ōn* is a personalization of *to ōn*, while preserving the ineffable character of *to ōn*; they are actually identical, as one can see in *Mut* 7–14, *Som* I 230 et al.

<sup>27</sup>) Cf. *Mos* I 75–76: *ouden onoma to parapan ep’ emou kyriologeitai, hō monō prosesti to einai*.

<sup>28</sup>) Cf. *Post* 168–9; *Deus* 62; *Fug* 165; *Spec* I 32–40; *Virt* 215; *Mos* II 99–100.

confirmation and [*the*] hypostasis of the All, the [*silent* (*sigē*) veil (*katapetasma*)], the [*true*] High Priest (*archiereus*), [*the one who has*] the authority (*exousia*) to enter the Holies of Holies, revealing (+*men*) the glory of the Aeons and (*de*) bringing forth the abundance (*chorēgia*) to <fragrance>. (Turner 1990:111–3)<sup>29</sup>

The text seems to display two levels of apophaticism: one regarding the Father, the other regarding the Son. First, the Valentinians make use of various symbols and concepts in order to underline the absolute apophatic dimension of the Father from the perspective of a created being. They primarily portray him as the “Monad” (*monas*: *Val Exp* 22,24 and 23,20) and “the Ineffable One (*piatšege araf*)” who dwells in the Monad” (*Val Exp* 22,20–1).

Second, there is another level of apophaticism, the one regarding the Son. The idea might not be obvious at first sight, since the Son receives such positive attributes or names as the Monogenes, the Mind or the High Priest. Nevertheless, he is also called the “Ineffable One” (*patšege araf*), a title which rather regards his hidden, apophatic dimension akin to the ineffable Father. Similarly, it is only the Son who can pass over the “Limit (*horos*),” the “Veil (*katapetasma*)” or the “Silence (*sigē*).”<sup>30</sup> While the *horos* seems to denote an element similar to the biblical firmament and a boundary which separates the multiplicity of creation from its creator,<sup>31</sup> the Veil makes reference to the Jewish curtain of the Temple, the *katapetasma* that separates the Holy Chamber of the Tem-

<sup>29</sup> See also Thomassen’s and Meyer’s translation: “Therefore, it was himself that he revealed in the Only One, and through him he revealed the ineffable... [They] saw him residing in Oneness, in Twoness, and in Four, bringing forth the Only One and the [Boundary]. And the Boundary... [separated] the All... is totally ineffable to the All, and the confirmation and actualization [*hypostasis*] of the All, the veil of [silence]. He is the [true] High Priest, the [one who has] the authority to enter the Holy of Holies, revealing the glory to the aeons and bringing forth the abundant wealth to <fragrance>” (Thomassen and Meyer 2007:668).

<sup>30</sup> The text does not appear to profess an apophaticism of the Father from the perspective of the Son, who seems to enjoy the full knowledge and vision of the Father. The Son’s portrayal as High Priest, the only person allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, might also be viewed as a metaphor regarding the absolute apophaticism of the Father from the perspective of created beings, such as angels and humans.

<sup>31</sup> Apparently there are two limits, one above the Pleroma, separating it from the Depth (*bythos*, i.e., the Father) and one below the Pleroma, separating it from the exiled Sophia (Pagels 1990:99; Quispel 1947:44).



ple from the Holy of Holies, now in a celestial-metaphorical version.<sup>32</sup> The Son as High Priest and Monogenes is the only one able to cross the limit or the border between the manifested and un-manifested realms. On the one hand, as Monogenes and Mind of all, he reveals the Father to all; as High Priest, on the other, he can proceed into the opposite direction entering the Holy of Holies and knowing the unknowable Father.

### 3. *Irenaeus of Lyons*

Irenaeus undertakes a similar articulation of an apophatic discourse in his commentaries on the visions of the prophets, especially the theophanies that Moses experienced. It is particularly worth noting that Irenaeus observed the opposing theological positions regarding the possibility of a *visio Dei* in Exodus 33 and Deuteronomy 5, both related to Moses.<sup>33</sup> His interpretation, however, was not that the two passages come from two different ancient theological milieus, most likely in polemic with each other. Irenaeus' interpretative solution, announced in the first lines of *Adversus Haereses* IV 20,1, was that the two passages were not contradictory, but reflected the hidden and manifest dimensions of the divine. God is neither comprehensible nor incomprehensible, but he is both at the same time, comprehensible and incomprehensible, visible and invisible:

As regards His greatness, therefore, it is not possible to know God, for it is impossible that the Father can be measured (*secundum magnitudinem non est cognoscere Deum; impossibile est enim mensurari Patrem*); but as regards His love (*dilectionem*) (for this it is which leads us to God by His Word), when we obey Him, we do always learn that there is so great a God (*semper discimus quoniam est tantus Deus*),

<sup>32</sup>) Its Hebrew name was *parokhet*, as one may see in Exod 26,31–35; 40,21–26 (LXX has *katapetasma*); cf. Matt 27,51, Mk 15,38; Lk 23,45; Heb 6,19 and 9,3 for the use of the Greek word in the New Testament writings, and especially Heb 6,19 for the idea of celestial veil and Jesus as High Priest.

<sup>33</sup>) See Exod 33,20: "My face you cannot see, for no mortal may see me and live." and Deut 5,24: "The Lord our God has indeed shown us his glory and his great power, and we have heard his voice from the heart of the fire: today we have seen that people may still live after God has spoken with them." Cf. Exod 24,9–11. In fact, Exod 33,11 advances the opposite position: "The LORD used to speak with Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another..."

and that it is He who by Himself has established, and selected, and adorned, and contains all things [...] (ANF 1:487).

The same formulation comes out a few pages further, in IV 20,5–6, where Irenaeus displays the two opposing biblical passages and advances the theological rationales for his solution. He first maintains that the Father comprehends all and cannot be comprehended by anything, including the mind. According to his greatness (*magnitudo* [Lat] / *megethos* [Gr]), God is neither encapsulated nor confined (*incapabilis* / *achōrētos*) by anything else, nor comprehended (*incomprehensibilis* / *akatalēptos*); he is invisible (*invisibilis* / *aoratos*) and beyond investigation, inscrutable (*investigabilis* / *anexichniastos*).

But he also leaves room for the accessible divine dimension, which depends on the divine dispensation, namely on God's love (*dilectio*), kindness (*humanitas*) and goodness (*benignitas* / *agathotēs*; *Haer* IV 20,5). Nevertheless, Irenaeus adds that divine goodness itself, though accessible as a dispensation through which human beings may see God, is ineffable (*inenarrabilis* / *anexēgētos*; *Haer* IV 20,5).

#### 4. *Clement of Alexandria*

Clement develops a negative theology as well in connection with the theophany which Moses experienced on Sinai, as the following passage from *Stromateis* II 2,6,1 illustrates:

As a result, Moses, convinced that God will never be known (*oupote gnōsthēsesthai*) to human wisdom, says, “Reveal yourself to me,” and finds himself forced to enter “into the darkness” where the voice of God was present; in other words, into the unapproachable (*adytous*), imageless (*aeideis*), intellectual concepts (*ennoias*) relating to ultimate reality (*peri tou ontos*). For God does not exist in darkness. He is not in space at all (*en gnophō ē topō*). He is beyond space and time and anything belonging to created beings (*hyperanō kai topou kai chronou kai tēs tōn gegonotōn idiotētos*). Similarly, he is not found in any section (*oud' en merei*). He contains nothing. He is contained by nothing (*periechōn ou periechomenos*). He is not subject to limit (*horismon*) or division (*apotomēn*). (Ferguson 1991:160–1)

However, Clement does not profess agnosticism in regard to God, but he deems that while God's essence (*ousia*) remains inaccessible, hidden and ineffable, the human mind can access the divine manifested power (*dynamis*) and works (*erga*):

For human speech (*logos*) is by nature feeble, and incapable of uttering God (*adynatos phrasai theon*). . . . Nor (do I say) His essence (*oude tēn ousian*); for this is impossible (*adynaton*), but the power and the works of God (*tēn dynamin kai ta erga tou theou*) (*Strom.* VI 18,166; ANF 2: 519).<sup>34</sup>

## 5. Origen

For Origen, as for the aforementioned theologians, hermeneutical exercise on biblical theophanies represents an opportunity to speculate philosophically about the possibility of knowing God. Polemicizing with the defendants of the idea of divine corporeality, he starts his argumentation in *De principiis* with the biblical episode about the theophany Moses saw on Sinai. The hermeneutical process offers to the Alexandrian the opportunity of displaying his philosophical assumptions. According to him, “nothing can be seen except by help of form, and size, and color, which are special properties of bodies (*Non enim aliter videri quid potest nisi per habitum et magnitudinem et colorem, quae sunt specialia corporum*; *De prin* II 4,3).” Corporeality, therefore, refers to sensible and created material things. To the contrary, God is incomprehensible, immeasurable, uncreated, immaterial, and seeing him represents pure impossibility (*De prin* I 1,5).

One of the most interesting Origenian passages may be found in his *Commentary on Isaiah* I 1–3, where he offers a Trinitarian interpretation of the Isaian vision of Yahweh inside the temple. The two seraphim protect mortal eyes from the astounding light of the character sitting on the throne. It is noteworthy that the Hebrew and Greek versions of Isa 6,2 are vague enough not to clarify whether the seraphim cover their own faces or the face of God. However, some ancient rabbinic documents support the former idea,<sup>35</sup> while Origen and other authors

<sup>34</sup> See also Hägg (2006:154–79, for the idea of apophaticism developed in the Middle-Platonist intellectual milieu, and page 161 for the context of interpreting Moses’ vision on Sinai; see pages 238–51, for the distinction between *ousia* and *dynamis*).

<sup>35</sup> The interpretation goes back to the rabbinic traditions of Midrash ascribed to R. Jacob b. Zaddi as one can see, for instance, in *Midrash Rabbah*-Lev 27,3: “It is written, *Above Him stood the seraphim; each one had six wings: with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly* (Isa 6,2). ‘*With twain he did fly*’ for the purpose of offering praise, ‘*And with twain he covered his face*’ in order not to look at the Shechinah, ‘*And with twain he covered his feet*’ that they might not be exposed to the view of the Shechinah, for it is written, *And the sole of their feet was like*

maintain the latter.<sup>36</sup> Origen not only sustains that the seraphim conceal the face of God, but he also makes known to us the meaning of their gesture. As God is not corporeal — one of Origen's main theological tenets — covering the face of God actually signifies that our knowledge of God's beginning is pure impossibility: '*Operiebant faciem Dei.*' *Exordium enim Dei ignotum est.* Moreover, as the seraphim cover God's feet as well, God's end is also beyond human understanding: '*Sed et pedes.*' *Novissimum enim quod in Deo nostro est, non comprehenditur* (*Hom Isa* I 2; PL 24, 904A).<sup>37</sup> In conclusion, no one can comprehend the origins of the uncreated, no one can comprehend God, and neither Moses, nor Isaiah was able to see the divine Face.

#### 6. Gregory Nazianzen's *Mysticism as Apophatic Theology*

Before analyzing Nazianzen's text, I would first underline his predecessors' accomplishments. The examples analyzed above may lead to the hypothesis of the existence of two types of language — one symbolic and one conceptual — having an almost identical purpose, namely to express the idea that God's core is inaccessible and no one can know what it is. While the old symbolic texts made use of the imagery of fire, dazzling light, clouds, human-headed lions, bulls, eagles, cherubim and seraphim in order to express the impossibility of accessing the divine *kabod*, Philo, the Valentinians, Irenaeus, Clement, Origen and Nazianzen construed an apophatic theology through philosophical terminol-

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*the sole of a calf's foot* (Ezek 1,7)" (Freedman and Simon 1961:345). See also *Targum Johnathan* on Isa 6,2: "Holy ministers stood in the height before him: each one had six wings; with twain he was covering his face that he might not see, and with twain he was covering his body that it might not be seen, and with twain he was ministering" (Stenning 1953:20). Cf. The Oxford Study Bible 1992:708, n.2.

<sup>36</sup> Origen offers the same Trinitarian interpretation of Isa 6,2 in *De prin* I 3,4 and IV 3,14. While he expressly points out that this idea belongs to his "Hebrew teacher," in I 3,4 he mentions the interpretation in connection with the book of the *Ascension of Isaiah*, a Christian document of the second century. It is interesting to see that Gregory's passage cited at the beginning of this article (i.e., *Or* 28,3, although based on Exod 25,20; 37,9 and 1 Kgs 8,7) mentions the cherubim who hide the *kabod*.

<sup>37</sup> See also the same interpretation of Isa 6,2 in *Hom Isa* IV 1 (PL 24, 912D-913C) in which he advances the idea that humans can know only the middle — i.e., the world and its history — but not the beginning and the end (i.e. the face and feet) of God, which only the Son and the Holy Spirit know.

ogy. Moreover, the aforementioned theologians elaborated the apophatic philosophical language predominantly within the exegetical context of the Old Testament theophanies of the *kabod*, therefore as a sort of “translation” of the apophatic theology through symbols.

With Nazianzen, we encounter not only the two apophatic languages and traditions — the symbolic and the conceptual — linked together as in Philo, the Valentinians, Irenaeus, Clement and Origen, but he also equates the central elements of the two languages, namely the heavenly *kabod* and the divine essence. According to him, the reality dwelling beyond the heavenly *katapetasma*, on the one hand, and the concept of the divine essence, on the other, are the same item. It is noteworthy that the passage from *Oratio* 28,3 given in the introduction of this article is not a *hapax legomenon* of the Cappadocian. To the contrary, Gregory expresses the same thought in *Oratio* 38,8 (PG 36, 320BC), a passage where he comments on the oracles God gave to Moses on the Mount (38,7), and affirms that the divine nature (*physis*) or the Godhead (*theotēta*) is the Holy of Holies which remains hidden even from the seraphim and is glorified with a trice repeated Holy (*ta Agia tōn agiōn, ha kai tois seraphim sygkalypsetai, kai doxazetai trisin agiasmois*).<sup>38</sup> The fragment obviously recalls Isa 6,2–3 and, through the expression “the Holy of Holies,” actually denotes the divine *kabod* Isaiah contemplated in the temple rather than the holiest room of the temple.

Nazianzen’s passage from *Oratio* 28,3 may be seen, on the one hand, as a Jewish or Christian ascent, in which the visionary undertakes a prior preparation and then has the vision of the heavenly temple. To a certain extent, it may be seen as proto-Hekhalot mysticism. However, Gregory’s discourse may rather be seen as part of a Moses/*kabod* tradition, which plays a central role in Philo’s and Gregory of Nyssa’s mystical theologies and also in those of the aforementioned authors.<sup>39</sup> The fact is suggestive, since Moses’ tradition is mostly a priestly and *kabod* tradition and Christian theologians appear to be strong supporters of a *kabod*-type theology, a theology about the glory and light of God. Nazianzen himself follows Moses’ paradigm: “I was running with a

<sup>38</sup>) The same formulation can be found in *Or* 45,4 (PG 36, 628D–629A).

<sup>39</sup>) See Philo’s *De Vita Mosis* and Gregory of Nyssa’s treatise with the same title, *De Vita Mosis*. Nazianzen himself mentions Moses by name a few lines later.

mind to see God and so it was that I ascended the mount.” In addition to this, Neoplatonic echoes are also present in the text. Gregory separates himself from matter and material things and this process is accompanied by introspection and withdrawal into himself (*eis emauton hōs hoion te systraphēis*).<sup>40</sup>

The step which follows these preparatory ascetical stages of ascension and introspection is vision: “I directed my gaze (*proseblepsa*) I scarcely saw (*eidon*).” Once again he recalls the biblical terminology of the Sinai theophany. The divine disclosure is identical with that of Sinai, where Moses saw not the face of God, but the “averted figure,” “the back parts of God” (*ta opisthia*).<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the presence of glory entails an obvious element of danger: Moses had to protect himself in the cleft of a rock, which Nazianzen identifies in his case with the Logos made flesh. In fact, the *partes posteriores Dei* and the rock are elements of divine concealment and Gregory’s next gesture — “bending a little” (*mikron diakypsas*) from his shelter towards the source of glory — uncovers at the same time an element of *fascinans* and the fact that he realizes that the *partes posteriores* are not the ultimate purpose of the vision. And at that very moment he sees “the grandeur (*megaleiotēs*), or as divine David calls it the “majesty” (*megaloprepeia*).”<sup>42</sup>

Some Isaianic echoes may be heard at this stage as well, since Gregory sees the divine majesty filling the whole earth, as in Isaiah’s vision, though now re-interpreted as the “majesty inherent in the created things he [God] has brought forth and governs.” In addition, Gregory makes

<sup>40</sup> See also Plotinus’ similar separation from all external things, interiorization, sojourn in the divine and vision of a marvelous beauty in *Enneads* IV 8, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. LXX, Exod 33,23: *ta opisō mou*, which OSB and NRSV render through “my back.” In fact a metaphor of concealment strongly connected with the theology of the divine face and glory, it will be later used in Christian visionary documents as Fossum has shown (Fossum 1995:95–108).

<sup>42</sup> Aristobulus, the famous Alexandrian Jew of the second century BCE, used the same term, “majesty” (*megaleiotēs*), in order to designate the immense, un-consuming divine fire that Moses saw on Sinai (Eus. *PE* VIII 10,17). One may suppose that the term became quasi-technical and denoted the biblical terms *kabod* and *doxa*. 2 Pet 1,16–17, while describing the light which the disciples saw in the theophanic episode of Jesus’ transfiguration on Mount Tabor, employs similar terms as Gregory, namely *megaleiotēs* and *megaloprepēs doxa*. For a scholarly discussion on this theme, see Fossum 1999:351.

the semiotic turn to Greek philosophical terminology into which he translates the biblical symbolic account. Thus, the reality which “abides within the first veil and is hidden by the Cherubim” is nothing else than “the first and unmitigated nature (*tēn prōtēn te kai akēraton physin*).” From an epistemological perspective, God’s nature is incomprehensible to the human mind and, of course, known solely by the divine persons of the Trinity: “self-apprehended (*heautē ginōskomenēn*) (by ‘self’ I mean the Trinity).” While Gregory experiences the vision of the majesty of God (the light which God makes manifest to the human mind), the nature of God remains unmitigated and concealed by the heavenly veil and the wings of the cherubim.

Gregory continues in the next lines by affirming that even if a visionary were holier than Moses and Paul (Gregory’s visionary models, Paul being recalled because of his ascension to the third heaven), it would still be impossible to have more knowledge of God:

For were a thing all heavenly, all super-celestial even, far more sublime in nature (*physin*) than ourselves, far nearer God, its remoteness from him and from his perfect apprehension (*teleias katalēpseōs*) is much greater than its superiority to our low, heavy compound. (Norris 1991:226)

He defends therefore the strict transcendence of the divine nature. More than that, the next chapter of the oration, *Oratio* 28,4, is even more philosophical, since Nazianzen becomes interested in the questions regarding God’s definition and apprehension, as well as regarding the capacity of language to express such an abstract subject:

So we must begin again with this in mind. To know (*noēsai*) God is hard, to describe him impossible (*phrasai de adynaton*), as a pagan philosopher taught — subtly suggesting, I think, by the word “difficult” his own apprehension, yet avoiding our test of it by claiming it was impossible to describe. No — to tell of God is not possible (*phrasai men adynaton*), so my argument runs, but to know him is even less possible (*noēsai de adynatōteron*). For language may show the known (*to men gar noēthen tacha an logos dēlōseien*) if not adequately, at least faintly, to a person not totally deaf and dull of mind. But mentally to grasp so great a matter (*to de tosouton pragma tē dianoia perilabein*) is utterly beyond real possibility (*pantōs adynaton kai amēchanon*) even so far as the very elevated and devout are concerned, never mind slack and sinking souls.... Whether higher, incorporeal natures can grasp it, I do not know (*ouk oida de, ei mē kai tais anōterō kai noerais physesin*). (Norris 1991:226)

Gregory therefore re-articulates his apophatic position through Greek philosophical terminology. It is not only impossible to express God, as Plato affirmed in *Timaeus* 28c, but also to apprehend or “to know him is even less possible,” because it is beyond the real possibility of mortals to “grasp so great a matter.”<sup>43</sup> In regard to the epistemic capacities of the natures more spiritual than human, most likely the angels, Gregory proclaims his ignorance.

## Conclusion

From a socio-cultural perspective, my paper evinces the process of Hellenization of the conception of divine inaccessibility. Theologically, my investigation points out the existence of two languages able to express this conception, namely biblical imagery and the Greek philosophical idiom. While Philo, Irenaeus, the Valentinians, Clement and Origen start and develop the “translation” from one idiom into the other, Gregory equates their focal points, namely the inaccessible *kabod* with the divine essence. Most likely, philosophical apophatic discourse emerges within the hermeneutical context of interpreting the theophanies of the Old Testament and in connection with the tradition of the forbidden element of mystical experiences. Conceptual apophatic language — a new garment for the ancient idea of divine inaccessibility — becomes

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<sup>43</sup>) I am much indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for two reasons. First, he alerted me to *Oration* 30,17, where Gregory re-affirms his thesis about the impossibility of the human mind to apprehend God’s nature and that of human language to express it: “Our starting-point must be the fact that God cannot be named (*to theion akatonomaston*)... no mind has yet contained or language embraced God’s essence in its fullness (*oute ousian theou pantelōs, e nous kechōrēken, e fōnē perielaben*)” (Norris 1991:273–274). Second, he suggested that Gregory, in his poetry written later in his life, tends to use more symbolic rather than philosophical language. Symbolic language is therefore potentialized again in poetry. Undoubtedly, symbolic language was employed in the centuries that followed Gregory in liturgical and mystical poetry from Romanos the Melodist and Symeon the New Theologian to John of the Cross, Angelus Silesius and many other inspired authors, and it is still highly appreciated nowadays. Consequently, the two languages — the symbolic and the philosophical — represent two modalities in which the human mind has been expressing, since the end of Antiquity, both its glimpses of the divine and the impossibility to comprehend it.



an important tool for the articulation of the ontology of the divine substance. Consequently, apophatic discourse in general represents an immemorial theological feature which clothed both symbolic and conceptual garments.

Another feature intimately connected with apophatic discourse is the dichotomy hidden-manifest, which in its turn clothed both symbolic and conceptual garments. While biblical theophanic accounts expressed this dichotomy particularly through various symbols and images, Hellenistic theologians re-expressed it through a discourse about the inaccessible divine nature and its accessible ek-stasis, the divine *hyparxis*, *dynamis*, *dilectio*, *erga*, *operationes* or *energeiai*.

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## Filmreife Epiphanien im dritten Raum: Ein transreligiöser Kult in Mumbai

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### Abstract

This study introduces a religious group based in present-day Mumbai and led by two Indian (Parsi) Zoroastrians. The group can be characterized as transreligious, as it appeals to followers with varied religious affiliations, without claiming to establish a new religion. After looking at the two leaders' biographies and tracing some of the important stages in their development from middle-class Parsi laypeople to their present status of "divine lights," the essay examines their main mythological, theological, and iconographic features. A description and analysis of an important ritual event (a birthday *darshan*) is followed by devotees' testimonies of "divine miracles" resulting from their encounter with the "divine lights." After some glimpses at the followers' day-to-day life, the essay ends with reflections on terminology, typology, and context.

### Keywords

cults, darshan, gurus, Hinduism, India, Mumbai, Parsi, religious innovation, trans-religious, hybrid, syncretism, Zoroastrianism

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## Einleitung

Religiöse Innovationen hat es stets und überall gegeben. Spätestens seit der Entstehung des Islam hat sich religiöse Kreativität allerdings überwiegend innerhalb oder an den Rändern der etablierten Religionen abgespielt. Die Leistungsfähigkeit der grossen Religionen, in der Regel mit Überstülpungen früherer Religionsbildungen einhergegangen, bestand offenbar nicht zuletzt darin, einen gleichermaßen stabilen wie innerhalb variabler Grenzen flexiblen systemischen Rahmen für Änderungs- und Ausdifferenzierungsprozesse vorzugeben. Nur äußerst selten haben sich aus solchen Innovationen systemische Einheiten gebildet, die einen von den tradierten Religionen dezidiert unabhängigen und zugleich eigenständigen neuen semantischen Referenzrahmen für religiöse Weiterentwicklungen darstellten. In vormoderner Zeit ist dies wohl nur bei den Schülern des Guru Nanak,<sup>2</sup> dem Sikhismus, der Fall gewesen. Im frühen 20. Jahrhundert war die Emanzipation einer neuen Religion aus einer in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts entstandenen devianten Bewegung innerhalb des zwölferschiitischen Islam zu beobachten: der Baha'ismus. Insgesamt ist seit dem 19. Jahrhundert ein Florieren religiöser Neubildungen feststellbar, die nun aber, anders als früher, nicht mehr ohne weiteres in die religiösen Formationen der vorhergehenden (Mutter-) Religionsfamilien integriert oder angelagert wurden, sondern vielmehr Eigenstatus erlangten. In der Fachterminologie hat es sich eingebürgert, diese Gruppierungen als Neue Religiöse Bewegungen oder auch Neue Religionen zu bezeichnen. Hinzu kommt das Spektrum von esoterischen/magischen/alternativen/paganen Spiritualitäten oder New Age, die sich zum Teil als eigene Religionsfamilie(n) beschreiben lassen — genau wie Ufo-Religionen. Diese Pluralisierung der globalen religiösen Landschaft ist eine Signatur der Moderne.

In der Forschung zu Neuen Religionen/Religiösen Bewegungen wurden unterschiedliche Typologien vorgeschlagen und verschiedene Gemeinsamkeiten dieser Neubildungen postuliert oder diskutiert. Dem steht die Beobachtung des amerikanischen Religionsforschers J. Gordon Melton von der UC Santa Barbara entgegen, wonach die meisten Paradebeispiele der Diskussion mehr Gemeinsamkeiten mit ihren jeweiligen "Mutterreligionen" aufweisen als untereinander (Melton

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<sup>2</sup>) Im folgenden wird auf die Verwendung von diakritischen Zeichen verzichtet.

2004:22). Aus dieser Beobachtung ergibt sich eine Einteilung der religiösen Vielfalt nach religiösen Herkunftsfamilien wie etwa bei Melton selbst in seiner *Encyclopedia of American Religions* (6. Auflage 2003) oder Christopher Partridge in seinem Handbuch *New Religions: A Guide* (2004). In diese Werke sind auch einige dem Zoroastrismus zugerechnete Neugründungen aufgenommen — u.a. die am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts in den Vereinigten Staaten gegründete und sodann auch in Deutschland und Nachbarländern aktive Mazdasnan sowie die Lovers of Meher Baba —, nicht aber die hier vorgestellte Neubildung. Während Mazdasnan ein interessantes Fallbeispiel für eine genealogische Re-Imagination und Transformation darstellt, wobei der Gründer keiner der seinerzeit real existierenden zoroastrischen Gemeinden angehörte (vgl. Stausberg 2002:378–400), handelte es sich bei Meher Baba um einen indischen Zoroastrier (Parsi) mit dem Geburtsnamen Merwan Sheriar Irani (1894–1969), der seit den 1920er Jahren eine internationale Karriere als Guru, Baba oder Avatar machte, wobei seine Anhänger, die Baba-Lovers, von ihm angehalten waren, den religiösen Vorschriften ihrer jeweiligen Herkunftsreligionen treu zu bleiben; die Lovers of Meher Baba bildeten keine eigene, neue Religionsgemeinschaft, sondern vielmehr eine transreligiöse Gemeinschaft, die sich in der gemeinsamen Verehrung der Göttlichen Liebe und ihrer Verkörperlichung in Meher Baba zusammenfand (vgl. Stausberg 2002:97). Sie ist transreligiös, weil sie bewusst Mitglieder verschiedener Religionen in ihre neue Gemeinschaft einbezieht, und keine eigene neue Religion zu stiften beansprucht. Dieses Charakteristikum trifft auch auf die hier vorgestellte religiöse Gruppe zu, die nicht nur wegen ihrer religionshistorischen Eigenart, als Einzelfall, Aufmerksamkeit verdient, sondern auch als Beispiel für näher zu benennende Grenzen der terminologischen Annäherung.

### **Von Mittelklasse-Laien zu “göttlichen Lichtern”**

Die Schwierigkeit der Annäherung beginnt bereits mit der Namensgebung. Denn die Teilnehmer bzw. Mitglieder der vorwiegend in Mumbai und Umgebung aktiven Gruppe geben sich zwar durch bestimmte Merkmale zu erkennen (s. unten), die Gruppe als solche aber trägt keinen eigenen Namen. Die mehrere tausend Personen unterschiedlicher



religiöser Provenienz zählende Gruppe ist identisch mit der Gefolgschaft zweier Personen, die von ihren Anhängern als lebende Gottheiten bzw. göttliche Lichtgestalten mit entsprechender Handlungsmacht verehrt werden: Shri Gururani Nagkanya Yogini (“die erhabene Königin der Gurus, Schlangenprinzessin, Yogini”) und Shri Jimmy Nagputhra Yogiraj (“der erhabene Jimmy, Schlangensohn, König der Yogis”).

Diese Bezeichnungen verweisen auf Gestalten der hinduistischen Mythologie: auf die göttlichen Schlangenwesen der Unter- bzw. Wasserwelt, auf den Gott Shiva als Yogiraja, Herr der Yogis. Auch im Namen bzw. Titel “Gururani” schwingen hinduistische Konnotationen mit. Aufmerken lässt jedoch die Wortbildung “Nagputhra”, deren Hinterglied (*puthra*, “Sohn”) avestisch ist. Der Eigenname “Jimmy” fällt sogar ganz aus der Wortreihe heraus; bei den Parsi wird Jimmy oft als anglierte Alltagsform des iranischen Personennamens Jamshid — einer Figur der mythischen Frühzeit Irans — gebraucht. Und in der Tat: Hinter diesen Anreihungen von klangvollen Appellativen verbergen sich zwei Parsi aus der urbanen Mittelklasse von Mumbai.

Die Chronologie der Transformation von Parsi in Gottheiten, für die es mit Ausnahme von Meher Baba in der Geschichte des Zoroastrismus keine Präzedenzfälle gibt, lässt sich nur lückenhaft und umrisshaft rekonstruieren. In Anbetracht der Verteilung der Geschlechterrollen im Parsi-Zoroastrismus — also dem Zoroastrismus so wie er bei den heutzutage etwa 69.000, größtenteils in Mumbai (früher Bombay) lebenden Parsi praktiziert wird — haben wir es hier nicht zuletzt auch deshalb mit einer aussergewöhnlichen Entwicklung zu tun, weil mit Gururani, der “Guru-Königin”, zunächst eine Frau im Vordergrund stand, wohingegen alle religiösen Ämter im Zoroastrismus Männern vorbehalten sind.

Mit bürgerlichem Namen hiess Gururani Nargis Minocher Bharcha. Über ihre “profane” Biographie ist nicht viel bekannt — auch nicht ihr Geburtsjahr. Die früheste uns bekannte Quelle ist ein 1978 veröffentlichter Jahresbericht einer sich für Leprakranke einsetzenden südindischen Hilfsorganisation mit Namen Donors’ Rehabilitation Home alias Vallalar Illam,<sup>3</sup> in der u.a. die “Collections made from and

<sup>3</sup>) Donors’ Home alias Vallalar Illam, Income and Expenditure Statement from 1.4.1977 to 31.3.1978 with the list of donations. Eighth Annual Report.

through Her Holiness Gururani (The Nagkanya) Nargis Minooji Yogin(i)ji” aufgelistet werden (S. 24f). Am Ende dieser Broschüre (unpaginiert hinter S. 37) findet sich ein dreiseitiges, durch rote Buchstaben drucktechnisch vom Rest hervorgehobenes Schreiben des Präsidenten der Hilfsorganisation, in dem er “once again”, was auf eine bereits (länger) bestehende Botschaftertätigkeit hindeutet, einen Einblick in das Wirken von “Her Holiness Guru Raniji Nargisji Minooji (Yoginiji)” gewährt, die er in Bombay selbst besucht habe. Eingeleitet wird der Beitrag von einem Bild, auf dem eine fast mädchenhafte Gururani in einem schulterlosen, langen, schimmernden Kleid, mit Hals-, Oberarm-, Handgelenk- und Fingerschmuck, einer Blumengirlande und einem Stirnmal dargestellt ist. Sie befindet sich in halb liegender Position, am Betrachter mit einem leichten Lächeln vorbeischauend, auf einem Bett, in dessen Rückenlehne eine überdimensionale Königskobra-Plastik eingearbeitet ist, die sich baldachinartig hinter ihr aufrichtet. Obwohl das Bild nicht sehr klar ist, scheint die dargestellte Frau nicht älter als höchstens 30 Jahre zu sein. (Es könnte sich natürlich um ein älteres Bild handeln.)

Während der ersten Jahr(zehnt)e ihrer göttlichen Mission operierte Gururani als eine Art Teilzeitgöttin. In einer der wenigen Aussagen über ihre Biographie, die man in den Publikationen der Gruppe finden kann, schreibt Ratanshaw Gandhi, ein Parsi aus der Kerngruppe der Verehrer, im Jahre 1985, Gururani sei nach Beendigung ihrer Schulausbildung in den Staatsdienst eingetreten, wo sie auch “bis heute” (1985) noch tätig sei.<sup>4</sup> Einer unserer Hauptinformanten (Informant 9) erzählte uns (im Februar 2008), dass er Gururani eine Zeit lang jeden Tag in ihrer Wohnung in Parel (Mumbai) abholt und dann mit dem Motorrad zur Arbeit gefahren habe. Gururani habe sich zwar bemüht, pünktlich bei der Arbeit einzutreffen, was ihr aber oft nicht gelungen sei. Die “relaxed timings” bei der staatlichen Eisenbahn, wo sie damals arbeitete, hätten ihr aber die Möglichkeit gegeben, ihre Mission weiter zu betreiben. Leider war für uns nicht in Erfahrung zu bringen, wann und unter welchen Umständen sie ihre Berufstätigkeit letztlich aufgab und eine Vollzeitgöttin wurde.

<sup>4</sup>) Ratanshaw Gandhi, “President’s Message”, Satguru Gururani Mandal Annual Day Celebrations 1985, unpaginiert, S. 9.

Die biographische Skizze, verfaßt von einem Mann, dessen Familie nach eigenem Bekunden seit über einem Jahrzehnt (also etwa seit den frühen 1970er Jahren) Frieden zu Füßen der beiden Gurus gefunden hat, zeichnet auch ansonsten ein Bild, das ein graduelles Übergleiten in die Rolle der Göttin andeutet: Musik und Religion seien von jeher ihre Hauptinteressen gewesen, und aus ihrem Interesse für die Religion sei dann die Einrichtung ihrer eigenen, anscheinend in ihrer Privatwohnung untergebrachten Verehrungsstätte (s. unten) hervorgegangen (Annual Day Celebrations, unpaginiert, S. 9). Einem Informanten aus dem engsten Umkreis der beiden Göttlichen (Informant 9) zufolge wollte Nargis ursprünglich in den Himalaya gehen und Asketin werden; dass ihre religiöse Karriere dann eine andere, charismatischere Richtung nahm, lasse sich aber nicht auf irgendein Initialereignis zurückführen.

Die sukzessive Annahme ihrer Rolle als Göttin lässt sich auch in der Geschichte ihrer ikonographischen Ausgestaltung nachverfolgen, wobei das oben erwähnte, im Jahre 1978 publizierte Bild einem Übergangstatus anzugehören scheint, bei dem zwar der überdimensionale Kobrakopf und die Blumengirlande einen Vorgeschmack auf die spätere Göttinnen-Ikonographie bieten, Körperhaltung und Gewand aber noch eine gelassene Bescheidenheit aufweisen. Die Publikation aus dem Jahre 1985 enthält auch eine Art Jugendbild, auf dem man Nargis, die spätere Gururani, hinter ihren Eltern stehen sieht, den rechten Arm auf deren Schultern gestützt, wobei nichts auf ihren besonderen göttlichen Status hinweist. Die göttliche Aura, die von ihr bereits als Kind ausgestrahlt sei, wird hier ikonographisch nicht markiert.

In dem bereits erwähnten Heft aus dem Jahre 1985 bietet Aspi Gev Vania, ein Parsi und Protagonist des engsten Kreises um die beiden Götter, allerdings ein alternatives biographisches Narrativ:<sup>5</sup> statt der graduellen Ausgestaltung religiöser Anlagen und Interessen findet man das Motiv der Beglaubigung durch frühere religiöse Autoritäten, die hier aber nicht dem Zoroastrismus entstammen; in den späten 1950er Jahren, was vermutlich in die Jugendzeit Gururanis und die Frühzeit der Bewegung fiel,<sup>6</sup> sei ihre Göttlichkeit von den betagten Sadhus des

<sup>5</sup> Aspi Gev Vania, "Secretary's Report", Annual Day Celebrations 1985, unpaginiert, S. 17–30.

<sup>6</sup> Auch einige unserer Informanten verlegen die Anfänge der Bewegung in die 1950er

alten Shivatempels in Ambernath (etwa 60 km von Mumbai in Maharashtra) (an)erkannt worden. Auch dieses Stadium ihrer Biographie wird in zwei Bildern der Publikation von 1985 illustriert. Eines der Bilder zeigt die junge Gururani vor dem Ambernath Shivatempel, auf einem weiteren Bild erscheint sie mit offenem langem, schwarzem Haar im Lotussitz in einem einfachen weissen, an Asketenkleidung erinnernden Gewand. Hier stützt sich Gururani auf einen Dreizack (*trishul*), an dem auch eine Trommel (*damaru*) befestigt ist, beides Attribute des Gottes Shiva und Begleitobjekte shivaitischer Asketen. Um den Hals trägt sie eine Gebetskette (*mala*). Vantias Bericht fährt fort, dass die Priester des Shivatempels Gururani aufgefordert hätten, an den von ihnen durchgeführten Opferritualen teilzunehmen und den anwesenden Tempelbesuchern ihren Segen teilhaftig werden zu lassen. Da dieser Segen wundervolle Wirkungen entfaltet habe, vor allem in der Form der Heilung von Krankheiten, sei die Anzahl der Verehrer angestiegen und es sei zur Nachfrage nach regelmässigen Zeremonien (s. unten) gekommen. Bemerkenswert ist dabei, dass das Ritual, bei dem sich die übernatürlichen/außergewöhnlichen Eigenschaften Gururanis zum ersten Mal öffentlich manifestierten, hier als Yagna/Jashan bezeichnet wird; dabei handelt es sich um die Namen für hinduistische Opferrituale und zoroastrische Priesterrituale. Offenbar soll hier das symbolische Kapital der hinduistischen und der zoroastrischen Ritualtraditionen nutzbar gemacht werden, wobei aber die Wirksamkeit der männlichen zoroastrischen Priesterreligion von der jungen Mata, wie Gururani hier respektvoll bezeichnet wird, zugleich überboten und in den Schatten gestellt wird. Auch in dem erwähnten Spendenregister aus dem Jahre 1978 heißt es, dass Gururani auf Anfrage von Leidenden selbst das Yasna bzw. Jashan ausführe, womit sie direkt in die Rolle eines zoroastrischen Ritualpriesters zu schlüpfen beansprucht.

Gururani steht Shri Jimmy Nagputhra Yogiraj zur Seite. Das war nicht immer so. Im Spendenregister von 1978 wird ein gewisser Shri Jimmi (sic) erwähnt und — wie einige andere Personen (u.a. sein Bruder) — mit dem Ehrentitel “Maharaj” bezeichnet. Eine Gleichstellung

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Jahre. Konkretere Aktivitäten und Zulauf neuer Verehrer ist aber erst für die 1970er Jahre bezeugt. Erst seit den 1980er Jahren wurden die Medien auf die Gruppe aufmerksam. Das Parsi-Magazin *Parsiiana* brachte in seiner Januarausgabe von 1987 eine kurze Reportage (Rogers 1987).

mit Gururani ist hier nicht zu erkennen. In der heutigen Präsentation und Wahrnehmung bilden Gururani und Yogiraj demgegenüber eine unzertrennliche Einheit, und auch langjährige, enge Vertraute der beiden, die es besser wissen müssten, beharrten in Gesprächen uns gegenüber auf der Auffassung, dass dies trotz des erkennbaren Altersunterschieds zwischen den beiden immer schon so gewesen sei. Das Heft aus dem Jahre 1985 ist aber offenbar noch näher an den Ereignissen. Hier schreibt Ratanshaw Gandhi, dass die Göttin denjenigen Verehrern, die Zuflucht zu ihr nähmen und in ihren Fußstapfen wandelten, einen Status der Gleichheit einräume, wofür “HIS HOLINESS SHIV SHAKTI GURUDEV SHREE JIMMY (YOGIRAJ)”<sup>7</sup> das beste Beispiel sei. Gandhi stellt klar, dass die beiden keine Blutsverwandten seien, sondern dass Jimmy schon seit seiner Kindheit an allen rituellen Veranstaltungen Gururanis teilgenommen habe. Aus dem Beitrag von Aspi Vania in demselben Heft erfährt man, dass dies offenbar deshalb der Fall war, weil seine Eltern — Pallonji und Tehmina Master, ein Parsi-Ehepaar — zu Gururanis frühen Verehrern gehörten.<sup>8</sup> Einer unserer Schlüsselinformanten (Informant 9) wusste zu berichten, dass der spätere Yogiraj 10 Jahre alt war, als sein Vater Gururani kennengelernt und seinen Sohn zu ihren Veranstaltungen mitgenommen habe. Aus dem eifrigen Verehrer-Kind wird der “Schlangensohn” der “Schlangenprinzessin”, der Mit-Gott der Gururani.<sup>9</sup> Zugleich gibt es, wie zu erwarten, auch Schilderungen, die schon in der frühesten Kindheit Jimmys göttliche Anlagen ausmachen wollen; so sei er etwa, wie man in einem Text aus dem Jahre 2007 (Journal, S. 70)<sup>10</sup> erfährt, nach seiner Geburt still gewesen und habe ein Lächeln zur Schau getragen — was entfernt an die Legende erinnert, dass Zarathustra bei seiner Geburt nicht geweint, sondern gelacht habe.

<sup>7</sup> In den Publikationen aus dem Umfeld Gururanis und Yogirajs wird peinlichst darauf geachtet, dass alle Nennungen der beiden “göttlichen Lichter” (einschliesslich der pronominalen) in Grossbuchstaben erfolgen. Im folgenden schliessen wir uns dieser gruppeninternen Konvention nicht an.

<sup>8</sup> Dort wird auch der Name zweier Geschwister (Shirin und Yezdi) erwähnt.

<sup>9</sup> Gelegentlich findet sich in Berichten von ausserhalb der Gruppe die Nachricht, Jimmy sei von Gururani adoptiert worden. Dafür konnten wir keine Bestätigung finden.

<sup>10</sup> Zu den Publikationen der Gruppe vgl. den Abschnitt “Wunder und ‘heilige Annehmlichkeiten’”.

“Much later”, nämlich im Jahre 1980, schreibt Vania 1985, sei Jimmy dann von ihr selbst zum Nachfolger der Göttin Gururani Mata gekrönt worden.<sup>11</sup> Diese Chronologie entspricht der uns vorliegenden Quellenlage, da das Spendenregister des südindischen Vereins von 1978 noch ausschliesslich Gururani in den Mittelpunkt stellt, während das Heft von 1985 beide Namen auf dem Titelblatt trägt. Einer unserer Informanten (Inf. 9) meinte sich (2008) zu erinnern, dass Jimmys “Krönung” etwa im Jahre 1981/2 erfolgt sei.

Jimmys Position als Nachfolger impliziert keine Wartestellung: Die beiden treten stets gemeinsam auf, und in der Art des Auftretts ist in der Regel keine Vorrangstellung Gururanis erkennbar. Gururani spielt auch nicht die Rolle einer Mutter oder einer Tante von Jimmy. Andererseits handelt es sich auch nicht um eine Liebesbeziehung; dementsprechend wird eine erotische Dimension ihrer Beziehung nirgends erwähnt. Die Stellung als Nachfolger trägt dem durchaus sichtbaren Altersunterschied zwischen den beiden Rechnung, wobei Jimmys Geburtsjahr allerdings ebenso geheim gehalten wird wie das von Gururani. Einer unserer Informanten (9), der Jimmy schon als Nachbarskind kannte, bestätigte allerdings (2008) unseren Eindruck, dass Jimmy Anfang 50 sei. Gururani dürfte 15–20 Jahre älter sein.

Wie Gururani ging auch Yogiraj zunächst offenbar noch seinem Berufsleben nach. Laut *Parsiana* hat Jimmy Handelsgewerbe studiert und trat dann eine Stelle bei einer Bank an (“which he gave up recently”; Rogers 1987:24). Der britisch-afghanische Reiseschriftsteller Tahir Shah weiss dazu in einem Buch aus dem Jahre 2001 unter Berufung auf einen Basararbeiter zu berichten, dass Jimmy als Angestellter in einer Bank gearbeitet habe; da sein Chef aber zugleich sein Verehrer gewesen sei, habe dies zu Komplikationen geführt: “The bank manager... felt obliged to crawl past the clerk on his hands and knees.” (Shah 2001:300) Diese Situation sei auf Dauer untragbar geworden und schliesslich habe Jimmy seine Stelle aufgegeben. Diese Begründung des Abbruchs der Berufstätigkeit zugunsten einer Karriere als Vollzeitgott konnte von uns nicht verifiziert werden.

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<sup>11)</sup> In einem anderen Beitrag dieses Heftes wird diese Krone als “Dornenkrone” bezeichnet, was auf das aufopferungsvolle Wirken der beiden “göttlichen Lichter” verweist (s. unten).

Die göttlichen Karrieren von Gururani und Yogiraj erfolgten offenbar nicht gegen den Widerstand oder unter Abschottung von ihren Familien, die beide als eher bescheidene, fromme Parsi-Familien beschrieben werden. Beide haben Geschwister: Gururani hat zwei Schwestern und einen Bruder, Yogiraj einen Bruder und eine Schwester, die alle anscheinend noch in engen Verbindungen zu ihren göttlichen Geschwistern stehen. Im Unterschied zu den Geschwistern, die eher im Schatten bleiben, spielen beide Elternpaare in den uns vorliegenden Publikationen seit Mitte der 1980er Jahre eine prominente Rolle; so gibt es immer wieder Aufnahmen, welche die beiden Götter im Kreis ihrer Eltern zeigen, wobei die Eltern oft beide Handflächen im Verehrungsgestus (*Anjali mudra*) aneinandergepresst halten, was die aus der Gott- bzw. Guruwerdung ihrer Kinder resultierende Rolleninverson anzeigt: nicht mehr die Kinder verehren ihre Eltern, sondern diese ihre göttlichen Kinder. An einem bestimmten Fest vollführten die beiden "göttlichen Lichter" für ihre Eltern eine öffentliche Verehrungszeremonie (z.B. *Journal* 2003, Farbtafeln nach S. 60ff). In späteren Heften gibt es stets auch einige Gedenkseiten für die inzwischen bereits verstorbenen Elternteile (nur Tehmina, die Mutter Yogirajs, lebt noch), und alle Jahrespublikationen seit 1997 enthalten einen Nachruf auf Pallonji Jamshedji Master, den Vater Yogirajs.

Die beiden Gottheiten lehnen die eigene Herkunftsreligion nicht ab. Zwar lassen ihre exaltierten Namen, ihre extravagante Kleidung und ihre Götter-Ikonographie, bei der sie gerne in Phantasielandschaften vor riesigen Kobramotiven gezeigt werden, ihre Parsi-Identität in den Hintergrund treten; diese wird aber keineswegs verleugnet, und ist auch den Verehrern nicht unbekannt. Früher begleitete Gururani, wenn man *Parsiana* glauben darf, ihre Parsi-Anhänger zum bedeutendsten indisch-zoroastrischen Feuertempel Indiens, dem Iranshah im kleinen Küstenort Udvada; Gururani habe bei ihren Parsi-Anhängern das Interesse am Zoroastrismus neu entfacht.<sup>12</sup> Mitunter schaltet die Gruppe sogar heutzutage noch Anzeigen in Parsi-Publikationen, sogar in solchen, deren Herausgeber der Gruppe gegenüber keine Sympathien aufweisen, wobei der Text durch Einfügung von Elementen zoroastrischer

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<sup>12)</sup> Rogers (1987:25): "She takes her Parsi devotees on trips to Iranshah, and has re-instilled in them the love for their own religion."

Ikonographie auf das Publikum zugeschnitten wird. Auch auf einigen gruppeneigenen Publikationen (Journal 2001, 2003, 2005) stehen Symbole des Zoroastrismus exklusiv an vorderster Stelle; in anderen Publikationen hingegen sind es hinduistische Symbole, Schlangenmotive oder Phantasielandschaften. In Anknüpfung an vishnuitische bzw. Naga-Mythologie — Kopf und Schultern des Gottes werden von neun Schlangen geschützt — sind es dabei in der Regel neun Schlangenhälse mit ausgefahrenen Zungen, die sich schützend über das Paar der “göttlichen Lichter” (*divyajyoti*)<sup>13</sup> wölben.

In Anbetracht der diesen zugewiesenen universellen Bedeutung erscheinen die jeweiligen Herkunftsreligionen als letztlich eher unerheblich. Es ist mit ihrem Status als lebendige Gottheiten wohl nicht mehr zu vereinbaren, selbst in einem Feuertempel den Gott Ahura Mazda zu verehren;<sup>14</sup> ihren Verehrern werden aber keine dementsprechenden Verbote auferlegt: diese werden vielmehr zur Religions- und Ritualkonstanz aufgefordert. Stets wird betont, dass die Verehrer ihren Herkunftsreligionen treu bleiben und ihre religiösen und rituellen Pflichten nicht vernachlässigen sollen, was unsere Informanten auch durchaus zu tun bekundeten. Die Teilnehmer, mit denen wir sprachen, empfanden es dementsprechend keineswegs so, dass sie mit der Verehrung von Gururani und Yogiraj ihre angestammten Religionen aufgeben würden. Aus ihrer Sicht besteht in dieser Koexistenz kein Konfliktpotential. Vertreter oder Anhänger der Herkunftsreligionen, die keine Verbindung zu den “göttlichen Lichtern” haben, können das natürlich anders sehen. Zumindest bei den Parsi findet man unterschiedliche Reaktionen. Einerseits ist uns bekannt, dass religiöse Gaben und Spenden seitens religiöser Institutionen unter gewissen Bedingungen angenommen werden, andererseits aber berichteten einige unserer Informanten von ablehnenden Reaktionen zoroastrischer Priester in Feuertempeln. Diese Informanten erzählten auch von ambivalenten Haltungen: einige Parsis würden nachts insgeheim den beiden

<sup>13</sup>) “Divyajyoti” ist die bei weitem am häufigsten verwendete Bezeichnung der Verehrer für Gururani und Yogiraj und wird daher auch von uns im folgenden verwendet.

<sup>14</sup>) In früheren Stadien ihrer religiösen Karriere war dies anders (siehe dazu Rogers 1987:25: “She regularly visits the agiaries and atash bahrams that people go to”). Es ist unklar, wann und unter welchen Umständen sie aufgehört haben, zoroastrische Feuertempel aufzusuchen.



“göttlichen Lichtern” Verehrung erweisen, täten aber tagsüber so, als kenne man sich nicht (Informantin 12 [2008]).

Obwohl Eltern, Geschwister und andere Verwandte von Gururani und Yogiraj namentlich bekannt sind, ist es nicht ohne weiteres möglich, eine Biographie der “göttlichen Lichter” zu verfassen. Mehr als die oben zusammengetragenen Informationen lässt sich kaum herausfinden — auch nicht durch Nachfragen in ihrem engeren Umkreis. Nachforschungen wird prinzipiell mit Skepsis begegnet, und der wissenschaftlichen Neugier werden schnell unlautere Motive unterstellt. Diese Kommunikationsbarriere wird dadurch verstärkt, dass Nachfragen nach Daten und Fakten von denen, die sie kennen müssten, oft als unerheblich angesehen werden. Die Geburtsjahre der beiden “göttlichen Lichter” beispielsweise sind insignifikant, wenn man sie in einen kosmischen Rahmen stellt. Die irdische Biographie der Protagonisten ist bestenfalls die Spitze des Eisbergs eines mythologischen Narrativs.

### **Mythologie, Ikonographie, Botschaft**

Die folgenden, graphisch hervorgehobenen Anfangszeilen eines Editorials aus dem Jahr 1996 (Journal) sind kennzeichnend für einen der mythologischen Hauptstränge in der recht diffusen mythischen Biographie der “göttlichen Lichter”: “Die ewig-barmherzigen Sri Gururani Nagkanya (Yogini) und Sri Jimmy Nagputhra (Yogiraj) kamen aus der Herrlichkeit der Mutter Natur auf die Erde herab in all ihrer Gnade, Reinheit, Weisheit und Wahrheit, nicht nur um den gemeinen Sterblichen den Gewand der Gerechtigkeit und spiritueller Geburt auf deren Weg zur Selbstverwirklichung zu geben, sondern auch, um den Menschen Gott zu offenbaren”.<sup>15</sup> Gururani und Yogiraj werden im genannten Beitrag zu kosmischen Hochgöttern stilisiert, mit deutlichen Anleihen bei Gottesvorstellungen von Universalgottheiten: präexistent

<sup>15</sup>) “Out of Mother Nature’s Heavenly Glory, the ever-merciful Living Gods of Eternity, Sri Gururani Nagkanya (Yogini) and Sri Jimmy Nagputhra (Yogiraj) stepped down on planet Earth in all Their Divine Grace, Purity, Wisdom & Truth, not only to give mere mortals the ‘Robe of righteousness’ & ‘Spiritual Birth’ on the path of Self-Realization, but also to reveal God unto man.” Journal 1996, Editorial, unpaginiert.

(“Milliarden von Jahren vor der Schöpfung sind sie bereits dagewesen”), hervorgegangen aus dem Licht, in das sie nach Erfüllung ihres göttlichen Auftrags wieder eingehen werden, sind sie die Quelle für die spirituelle Wiedererweckung nicht nur der Menschheit, sondern des gesamten Kosmos, heisst es im gleichen Text. Ähnlich wie die “lebenden manifestierten Götter” anderer Zeitalter nehmen auch sie “furchtbare Mühen, Entbehrungen, und Leiden” auf sich, “verursacht durch eine rücksichtslose Welt (...) bevölkert von sündigen Sterblichen”. Bei der Beschreibung der höchstgöttlichen Qualitäten und Attribute bedienen sich die (namentlich nicht genannten) Verfasser dieses und anderer Editorials mit eulogisch-hyperbolisierendem Inhalt unterschiedlicher Idiome. So bezeichnen sie Gururani und Yogiraj beispielsweise häufig als *mahaparameshvari* und *mahaparameshvar*, höchste Göttin und höchster Gott, und bemühen zur besseren Illustration von deren postulierten Hypostasen als Schöpfer, Erhalter und Zerstörer (des Bösen) dabei gerne einen eher plakativen Vergleich mit der hinduistischen Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu und Shiva).

In den ab Mitte der 1990er Jahre veröffentlichten Jahresheften wird darüber hinaus ein mythologischer Strang fortgeführt, der offensichtlich seit Beginn der göttlichen Karriere Gururanis (und später Yogirajs) eine Konstante im Zeichen- und Narrationsrepertoire der Bewegung geblieben ist, nämlich die frühere Verkörperung der beiden als Schlangenwesen. Demnach war Gururani eine Schlangenprinzessin (*nagkanya*) in der Unter- bzw. Wasserwelt Patala, einer von “Nixen, Schlangen- und Fischprinzessinnen” bevölkerten Welt voller sagenumwobener Schätze, die von vielköpfigen, juwelenbekrönten Schlangenherrschern regiert wurde (“Be Ye As Wise and Guileful as Serpents” im Journal 1985, unpaginiert). Theo-biographisch nicht näher ausgeführt, prägte diese Episode besonders die Ikonographie der Bewegung nachhaltig: Schlangenmotive, besonders Kobraköpfe, sind ein fester Bestandteil der farbenprächtigen Bilder auf den Umschlägen der Jahreshefte ebenso wie bei der Dekoration ihrer Auftritte, den sog. Darshans (s. unten), oder zieren als Tilaks die Stirn der “göttlichen Lichter”.

Das Wirken der in der Gruppe aktiven Mythenkompilatoren, die unter anderem aus Puranas, Bibel und den Schriften Madame Blavatskys schöpfen, und die Tätigkeit der Bildbearbeiter (ausgiebiger Photoshopeinsatz!) zeichnet sich durch grosse Assoziationsfreudigkeit aus.

Die Palette der mit Gururani und Yogiraj in Verbindung gebrachten Gottheiten etwa ist breitgefächert. In einer Reihe von Jahreshften treten die beiden auf jeweils gleichen, ganzseitigen Abbildungen unter anderem als Nagas (Schlangengottheiten), als Lakshmi (auf einem Lotus auf dem Weltozean stehend und von einer Inschrift begleitet, die sowohl Gururani als auch Yogiraj(!) mit Lakshmi identifiziert), und als Sonnengottheiten (auf einem von sieben Pferden gezogenen goldenen Wagen) in Erscheinung. In einem der Hefte sind beide mit einer Flöte abgebildet, in Anlehnung an Krishna. Bei Darshans wurden sie in der Vergangenheit öfter als Shiva und Parvati in Szene gesetzt (Himalaya-Szenerie im Hintergrund, Nandi, Dreizack). Bemerkenswert ist, dass die „göttlichen Lichter“ auf allen seit 1985 angefertigten Bildern mit einem Heiligenschein ausgestattet sind.

Im Jahr 1985 gab die Gruppe um Gururani und Yogiraj eine erste umfangreichere Publikation mit dem Titel *Satguru Gururani Mandal Annual Day Celebrations* heraus. Neben einer Reihe von Beiträgen, die von langjährigen Anhängern verfasst wurden, enthält das Heft einen Text auf Hindi, der mit *Paugam* („Botschaft“) überschrieben ist, und der entweder direkt von Gururani stammt, oder — viel wahrscheinlicher — eine Art Zusammenstellung von Ausschnitten aus ihren Reden darstellt.<sup>16</sup> Keines der uns vorliegenden späteren Jahreshfte (1996–2007) enthält Vergleichbares. Dieser Text ist daher eine einzigartige Informationsquelle für die religiöse Botschaft Gururanis. Die Lektüre offenbart allerdings inhaltlich im indischen Kontext wenig Überraschendes: Hervorgehoben wird die Bedeutung des Gurus, der den Menschen hilft, die negativen (äusseren wie auch inneren) Einflüsse, denen sie fortwährend ausgesetzt seien, zu überwinden, und der ihnen den Weg zur Erlösung (*mukti*) weist. Der Erlösungsaspekt wird (in den Publikationen ebenso wie in persönlichen Gesprächen mit Verehrern) kaum betont. Zwar werden Gururani und Yogiraj neben zahlreichen anderen Appellativen auch als „Saviours“ bezeichnet, deren Mission darin besteht, „to lead mankind on the path of mukti“ (Journal 1998, „Holy Remembrance“, unpaginiert), doch insgesamt überwiegen

<sup>16</sup> Teile dieses Textes finden sich in leicht abgewandelter Form auf CDs mit früheren Reden Gururanis wieder, die am Rande der Darshans käuflich erstanden werden können.

die diesseitsbezogenen Aspekte, wie etwa “spiritual freedom and material happiness”. (Journal 1998, Editorial, unpaginiert).

Auch die Gleichsetzung des Gurus mit einer Gottheit ist im indischen Kontext nicht ungewöhnlich. Auffallend ist jedoch das Fehlen einer ethisch-moralischen Handlungsanweisung an die Schüler. Die Notwendigkeit einer von diesen zu erbringenden Eigenleistung wird zwar betont, näher ausgeführt wird dies aber nicht. Stattdessen wird das Wirken der Gurus immer wieder in den Vordergrund gerückt, und Gururani und Yogiraj gottgleicher Status hervorgehoben: Ihre Unterweisung ist göttlich (*brahmagyan*, “Brahma-Wissen”), ihre Natur ist göttlich, sie sind Lichtträger ( *jyotdharis*), Avataaras, *amshas* (vollwertige Teile) Gottes. In ihnen, den göttlichen Gurus, seien alle Religionen enthalten, und sie könnten allen Leidenden unabhängig von deren Religionszugehörigkeit helfen. Die im Vergleich zu herkömmlichen Tempelbildern höhere Effektivität solcher Gurus wird mit Verweis auf karmische Gesetzmässigkeiten begründet: Dass die Menschen ab einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt keine Hilfe mehr bei ihren Gottheiten fänden, liege nicht an den Götterbildern oder generell an den frequentierten Verehrungsstätten, sondern daran, dass die Gläubigen ihr karmisches Guthaben gewissermassen erschöpft hätten. An diesem Punkt könne der Guru mit einem Karma-Darlehen aus dem reichen Schatz seiner angesammelten guten Taten einspringen. Die so entstandenen Schulden müsse der “Darlehensempfänger” durch hingebungsvolle Verehrung des Gurus und tugendhaften Lebenswandel abbezahlen. In Interviews wurde gelegentlich auch die Erwartung finanzieller Gegenleistungen angedeutet oder gar ausgesprochen.

In Anbetracht der voll entfalteten Göttlichkeit, die Gururani und Yogiraj um 1990 für sich reklamierten, geschah in den darauffolgenden Jahren eine überraschende Wendung: Während einer ihrer Wallfahrten nach Gujarat Anfang der 1990er Jahre begegneten Gururani und Yogiraj im Dorf Naroda (bei Surat) einem Mann, der offenbar einen so tiefen Eindruck auf sie hinterliess, dass sie ihn als ihren Guru annahmen. In den uns vorliegenden Jahresheften der Jahre 1996–2007 nimmt der “verehrungswürdige gottgleiche Guru” Dasharathabhai Jinabhai eine herausragende Stellung ein: Ein ganzseitiges Jugendbild des blinden Mannes, der im Mai 1996 verstarb, leitet die Hefte ein, noch vor den Bildern der verstorbenen Eltern Gururani. In einem Textbeitrag

mehrere Seiten dahinter werden die Umstände der Begegnung kurz geschildert und Bezüge zu prägenden Figuren der nordindischen Bhakti-Religiosität hergestellt. Der blinde Lokalheilige Jinabhai, zu dem, wie es heisst, seit vielen Jahren jeden Montag zahlreiche Menschen aus den umliegenden Dörfern pilgerten, wird mit dem (der Legende nach zeitlebens blinden) Dichterheiligen Surdas verglichen und als “Surdas von Naroda” bezeichnet. Jinabhais Zugehörigkeit zu einer niederen *jati* veranlasste zudem den Verfasser dieses Textes, eine Parallele zwischen ihm und Ravidas, dem Guru der weiblichen Dichterheiligen Mirabai, herzustellen, der (der Überlieferung nach) ein Schuhmacher war. Gururani und Yogiraj reihen sich auf diese Weise in eine regionale Gurutradition ein, die sie gewissermassen nach Mumbai verlängern.<sup>17</sup> Wenn die “göttlichen Lichter” selbst sich nicht zu schade sind, sich einem Guru zu unterwerfen — ein Akt, der ihrem Status offenbar keinen Abbruch tat — dann sollten die Normalsterblichen nicht davor zurückschrecken, sich ihnen zuzuwenden.

## Heiligtümer

Die Chronologie der Ausbreitung und der rituellen Praktiken und Szenarien der Gururani-Verehrung ist nur approximativ zu rekonstruieren. Gururanis erste öffentliche Auftritte fanden — vermutlich in den späten 1950er Jahren — anscheinend in Ambernath statt (s. oben). In der Entwicklung ihrer religiösen Karriere spielte offenbar die Gestaltung eines eigenen Heiligtums eine wichtige Rolle. Sowohl der Text im Spendenregister des Donor’s Home alias Vallalar Illam aus dem Jahre 1978 als auch das Heft der Annual Day Celebrations von 1985 erwähnen ihren “Agyari-cum-Mandir” (1978) bzw. “Agyari-cum-Mandir-cum-Masjid” (1985), also ein Heiligtum, das die Eigenschaften eines zoroastrischen Feuertempels (Agyari), eines Hindu-Tempels (Mandir) und einer Moschee (Masjid) in sich vereint; das Heiligtum sei dabei als Ergebnis eigener spiritueller Praxis (“Self-Sadhana”; 1978 auch: “Self-Made”!) zustande gekommen — was wohl heissen soll, dass es nicht

<sup>17)</sup> Darüber hinaus werden zugleich Assoziationen hergestellt (Surdas, Mirabai), die weit über die Region hinausführen.

von Autoritäten der genannten Religionen geweiht bzw. legitimiert wurde. Ein Bild in der Publikation von 1985 zeigt Gururani und Yogiraj bei der Durchführung eines Jashan-Rituals (s. oben) in ihrem Privatheiligtum.<sup>18</sup>

Als Adresse wird Gururanis relativ bescheidene Wohnung in einer typischen Mittelklasseparsiwohnanlage im Mumbaier Stadtteil Parel angegeben.<sup>19</sup> Dort, heisst es in einer Publikation aus dem Jahre 1999, hätten sich zahllose Fälle von Heilung abgespielt, und durch das Verücken des Mobiliars sei es ihr gelungen, Platz für 150 Leute in ihrem “Parel Darbar” (“Königliche Empfangshalle in Parel”) zu machen. Der Publikation von 1999 zufolge habe Gururani von 1968 bis 1972 ausschließlich in eigener Regie von Parel aus operiert. Als die Zahl der Besucher allerdings in die Tausende gegangen sei, habe sie begonnen, in Mumbai und Umgebung auf städtischen Plätzen (“in open government grounds”) öffentliche “Darshans” abzuhalten. Eine Informantin berichtete jedoch, dass im Haus einer befreundeten Parsi-Familie, die zu den engsten Anhängern Gururanis gehört, noch bis in die frühen 1980er Jahre Darshans stattfanden (Informantin 13 [2008]). Diese Darshans werden auch von einer anderen Parsi-Informantin erwähnt, die seit 1978 solche Veranstaltungen besucht und heutzutage zum engsten Kreis um Gururani und Yogiraj zählt. Sie beschrieb diese Darshans als “limited darshan”, da einerseits relativ wenig Leute teilnahmen und sich das Ereignis nur auf wenige Elemente beschränkt habe (Informantin 7 [2008]). Laut dem Journal von 1999 sei der Zugang zum Parel Darbar im Laufe der Zeit eingeschränkt worden (Journal 1999). Die Publikation aus dem Jahre 1978 erweckt jedoch den Anschein, als habe Gururani auch damals noch sogenannte “Open Holy Baithaks” (“Offene Heilige Zusammenkünfte/Versammlungen”) in Parel abgehalten.

Daneben führt das Spendenregister von 1978 noch eine Adresse im Ort Ulhasnagar (etwa 60 km nordöstlich von Mumbai, in der Nähe von Ambernath) auf. Einer unserer zentralen Informanten berich-

<sup>18)</sup> Auf dem Bild trägt der Yogiraj keine Kopfbedeckung, was in der zoroastrischen Priesterritualistik als ein gravierender Ritualfehler gilt, der zur Ungültigkeit oder gar Schädlichkeit des ausgeführten Rituals führt.

<sup>19)</sup> Parel war seit dem späten 19. Jahrhundert von der Textilindustrie geprägt; in letzter Zeit erfuhr der Stadtteil eine gewisse Aufwertung.

tete, dass er, sein Bruder, ein Freund und Jimmy mit ihren Motorrädern nach Ulhasnagar zu fahren pflegten, mit Gururani als Sozia! In Ulhasnagar hatte einer von Gururanis Arbeitskollegen und zugleich einer ihrer ersten Verehrer ein Haus, in dem eines der Zimmer für sie reserviert war; unserem Informanten zufolge hielt sie sich dort oft tagelang auf, um zu meditieren und zu beten (Informant 9 [2008]). Sonntags stellten sich dort anscheinend häufig so viele Menschen ein, dass viele von ihnen vor dem Haus auf der Strasse bleiben mussten. Als die räumlichen Begrenzungen in Parel und Ulhasnagar immer unbefriedigender wurden, schaute man sich nach einem neuen Gelände um, und konnte schließlich ein mit einem kleinen Gebäude bebautes recht grosses Grundstück in einem seinerzeit noch wenig erschlossenen Teil von Ulhasnagar (Ashila Gaon) erwerben, finanziert u.a. aus den Ersparnissen aus der Berufstätigkeit der “göttlichen Lichter” und Spenden ihrer Verehrer.

Neben den beengten räumlichen Verhältnissen hatte unserem Informanten zufolge allerdings noch ein weiterer Faktor zur Aufgabe des alten zugunsten eines neuen “Darbar” geführt. Denn der Eigentümer des “alten Darbars” hatte sich offenbar Hoffnungen auf einen höheren Status an der Seite von Gururani gemacht. Als Jimmy zu ihrem Nachfolger gekrönt wurde, kam es zum Zerwürfnis, wohingegen seine Frau den “göttlichen Lichtern” treu blieb und bis heute als eine von vier sog. Matas (Vertraute Gururanis, die ein besonders hohes Ansehen innerhalb der Anhängerschaft geniessen, darunter auch Yogirajs Mutter) zum inneren Kern der Verehrer zählt (Informant 9).

Die kollektiven Verehrungsveranstaltungen werden spätestens seit den 1980er Jahren als Darshans bezeichnet, ein aus der Sprache des indischen Tempelkults vertrauter Begriff (vgl. Eck 1998). Solche Darshans wurden einer Publikation aus dem Jahre 1985 zufolge in verschiedenen Vororten Bombays abgehalten, wobei es regelmässig zu Phänomenen von Besessenheit und Heilung gekommen sein soll. Die Verehrung Gururanis und Yogirajs erstreckte sich auf verschiedene Religionsgemeinschaften, und die Publikation von 1985 erwähnt, dass auch religiöse Spezialisten verschiedener Religionen (“Sadhaks, Brahmins, Dastours [= zoroastrische Priester] and other Priests”) von diesen Veranstaltungen profitiert hätten. Das ist zwar sicher auch religiöse Propaganda, es ist aber gut möglich und zumindest für zoroastrische Priester auch bezeugt, dass in der Tat religiöse Spezialisten ihre Darshans

aufsuchten — wie ja auch Gururani und Yogiraj sich nicht scheuen, auf ihren Reisen mit Protagonisten und Vertretern verschiedener Religionen in Kontakt zu kommen.

Der “neue” Darbar von Ulhasnagar wurde im Laufe der Zeit weiter ausgestaltet (musste aber vor einigen Jahren wegen einer Strassenerweiterung etwas verkleinert werden). Der (auch auf wikimedia zu lokalisierende) “Sri Jimmy Nagputhra (Yogiraj) & Sri Gururani Nagkanya (Yogini) Darbar” liegt etwas abgelegen an einer wenig befahrenen Strasse im südwestlichen Teil Ulhasnagars. *Darbar* (“königliche Empfangshalle”) bezeichnet in diesem Fall ein etwa 800 m<sup>2</sup> grosses, umzäuntes Areal, auf dem ein langgezogenes, im Laufe der Jahre mehrmals erweitertes ebenerdiges Gebäude steht. Mehreren Informanten zufolge befindet sich in diesem Gebäude auch ein Raum, in dem Gururani und Yogiraj während ihrer Aufenthalte im Darbar fast ununterbrochen für das Wohl ihrer Anhänger und der gesamten Menschheit beten. Andere Räume dienen als Aufenthalts- bzw. Lagerraum. An der Rückseite des Gebäudes und eine kleine Werkstatt ist entlang der Vorderseite erstreckt sich ein Hof, in dem sich die Anhänger Gururanis und Yogirajs zum Darshan versammeln.

Wie bereits erwähnt, fanden zeitweise auch an verschiedenen öffentlichen Orten Mumbais Darshans statt. Die Publikation von 1985 erwähnt, dass man auch in armen Gegenden in der Stadt, teilweise in Slums, Darshans durchgeführt habe. Grössere, repräsentativere Veranstaltungen sind in den späteren Jahreshften zum Teil auch photographisch festgehalten. Wegen verschärfter Lärmvorschriften wurden solche nächtlichen Veranstaltungen in der Innenstadt mit Einschränkungen versehen oder sogar ganz verboten. Aus diesem Grunde wurden die regulären Darshans zuletzt nur noch im Darbar in Ulhasnagar abgehalten. Für kürzere Veranstaltungen, bei denen die beiden “göttlichen Lichter” nicht anwesend sind, und die zumeist am späten Nachmittag stattfinden, werden nach wie vor Räumlichkeiten in und um Parel angemietet.

Es gibt keine zuverlässigen Angaben für die Zahl der Teilnehmer an den Darshans. In den Publikationen der Verehrer werden Zahlen im fünfstelligen Bereich genannt;<sup>20</sup> solche Zahlenangaben beziehen sich

<sup>20</sup>) Journal 1999: “Today, at a time, thirty to forty thousand disciples and devotees attend ‘THEIR’ Darshanas...”



vermutlich auf einen gesamten Jahreszyklus, so dass die Anzahl der Verehrer (pro Veranstaltung und als Gesamtmenge) entsprechend niedriger ausfällt, da jeder Verehrer im Laufe eines Jahres an mehreren Veranstaltungen teilnimmt. Es ist leider auch nicht möglich, Schwankungen der Teilnehmerzahlen zu rekonstruieren. Wohl aber wird man davon ausgehen können, dass die Darshans seit den 1980er Jahren eine gewisse Aufmerksamkeit in Mumbai erregten. So soll einer Parsi-Informantin zufolge, die sich als Augenzeugin darstellte, im Oktober 1985 der Gründer der Hindu-nationalistischen und Marathi-populistischen Shiv Sena, Bal Thackeray, an einem Darshan teilgenommen haben (Informantin 14 [2008]). Die Publikation aus dem Jahre 1985 zeigt zudem einen ehemaligen Stadtratsabgeordneten, wie er sich im Februar 1985 vor Gururani verbeugt. Die gesteigerte Aufmerksamkeit, die Gururani und Yogiraj Mitte der 1980er Jahre erfuhren, spiegelte sich auch in einem im März 1985 erschienenen Artikel in einem Marathi-Magazin, der von mehreren Informanten als Auslöser eines größeren Zulaufs beschrieben wurde. (Einer der Redakteure soll bei einem Darshan selbst ein Wunder erlebt haben.) Das Journal für das Jahr 1996 enthält ausserdem Photos, auf denen die Teilnahme einiger bekannter Medienpersönlichkeiten (Bollywood-Musiker und Radio-Talkmaster) dokumentiert wird, was einerseits für die Bekanntheit von Gururani und Yogiraj spricht, andererseits aber der Bewegung auch als Vermarktungs- und Propagandainstrument dienen konnte.

Eine Teilnahme ähnlich prominenter Persönlichkeiten wird in den Publikationen des letzten Jahrzehnts nicht mehr erwähnt, was auf ein abflauendes Interesse an Gururani und Yogiraj hindeuten könnte.<sup>21</sup> Das könnte allerdings auch Strategie sei, denn im Unterschied zu früher werden die Darshans nun auch nicht mehr in Tageszeitungen angekündigt; stattdessen bedient man sich informeller Netzwerke, mit Hilfe derer z.B. die Verlegung von Terminen auch relativ kurzfristig verbreitet wird. Diese Strategie und auch einige Interviews lassen erkennen, dass man offenbar nicht (mehr) unbedingt auf numerischen Zuwachs bedacht ist. Das wurde auch in mehreren Interviews angesprochen; ein

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<sup>21)</sup> Während der Arbeit an diesem Aufsatz ist allerdings ein Artikel in TimeOut Mumbai mit dem Titel "Light fantastic" in der Rubrik Editor's Picks erschienen, verfaßt von CJ Kurrien. ([http://www.timeoutmumbai.net/editorspicks/editors\\_picks\\_details.asp?code=13&source=3](http://www.timeoutmumbai.net/editorspicks/editors_picks_details.asp?code=13&source=3), zuletzt aufgerufen am 5. Juli 2009)

Informant rechtfertigt die überschaubare Zahl an Verehrern damit, dass es eben nur relativ wenigen vorbehalten bleibe, der allerhöchsten Gottheiten teilhaftig zu werden (Informant 10 [2008]). Ein anderer Informant sagte, man verzichte auf Werbung und Mission, um sich auf einige Ausgewählte zu beschränken (Informant 4 [Februar 2008]).

Ob die Teilnehmerzahl dementsprechend im Laufe der Zeit gesunken ist, lässt sich, wie gesagt, nicht genauer ermitteln. Tahir Shah nennt im Jahre 2001 eine Teilnehmerzahl von viertausend; aufgrund unserer Beobachtungen dürften Zahlen von zwei- bis viertausend Teilnehmern pro Darshan für das letzte Jahrzehnt nicht unzutreffend sein. Die Fluktuation der Verehrer war von uns nicht zu erheben. Parsi stellen eine Minderheit des Publikums dar. Das Gros der Verehrer sind Hindus aus Maharashtra und Gujarat, man findet allerdings auch Jains. Weiterhin werden einige Christen und Muslime genannt. Die soziale Schichtung der Verehrer war für uns nicht näher zu ermitteln; die Teilnehmerschaft schien insgesamt der unteren Mittelschicht anzugehören.

Die Darshans sind die Epiphanien der "göttlichen Lichter". Ausserhalb der Darshans führen die beiden ein zurückgezogenes Leben innerhalb ihrer Darbars, vorwiegend in der kleinen Wohnung im mehrstöckigen Parsi-Wohnblock in Parel, weitgehend abgeschirmt und umhegt von ihren engsten Vertrauten. Der Darbar in Parel wird in der Wahrnehmung der Verehrer zu einem Ort mit mythisch-kosmischen Assoziationen: Vishnu-gleich ruht Gururani in ihrem Darbar auf einer Schlange, was sie auch mit der Göttin Lakshmi in Verbindung bringt. Die Aussenwelt quittierte diese Art der mythischen Assoziation mit Gerüchten, wonach gefährliche Schlangen in der Wohnung gehalten würden. Die Publikationen zeichnen ein Bild religiöser Aktivität, in dem sich Versenkung und Askese vermischen: die "göttlichen Lichter" seien im Darbar immerwährend in Gebet oder Meditation eintrückt und nähmen kaum Nahrung und nicht einmal Wasser zu sich. Ihrer aufopferungsvollen, aber nicht näher bestimmten religiösen Tätigkeit im Darbar wird welterhaltende und welterrettende Bedeutung zugesprochen. Die Verehrer preisen durchweg ihre Bescheidenheit und Anspruchslosigkeit auf der einen und ihre Fürsorge für die ihnen ergebenden Individuen und die gesamte Welt auf der anderen Seite.

Der asketisch-meditative Lebensstil wird bei den Darshans temporär zugunsten extravaganter Auftritte in exzentrischer Kleidung unterbro-

chen (s. unten). Auch im Darbar kommunizieren die “göttlichen Lichter” aber durchaus mit ihren engen Vertrauten, und es kann vorkommen, dass Ausgewählte Einlass und Privataudienzen erhalten. Manchmal finden auch Audienzen am Darbar in Ulhasnagar statt.<sup>22</sup>

Neben den Darshans bieten als Wallfahrten (*yatra*) firmierende Ausflüge den “göttlichen Lichtern” die Gelegenheit, ihre Darbars zu verlassen und sich in der Welt zu bewegen. Dazu zählen einerseits Besuche lokaler Heiligtümer in Mumbai und Maharashtra, wobei zoroastrische und hinduistische Stätten aufgesucht werden: zoroastrische Stätten für und mit ihren Parsi-Verehrern, Hindu-Stätten für und mit ihren Hindu-Verehrern. Darüber hinaus wurden auch Reisen nach Gujarat, den traditionellen Siedlungsregionen der Parsi in Westindien, unternommen. Auf einer dieser Wallfahrten kamen die “göttlichen Lichter” auch in Kontakt mit einer religiösen Persönlichkeit, die sie dann als ihren Guru annahmen (s. oben). Ausserdem werden gelegentlich aber auch in Begleitung einer manchmal auch größeren Schar von Untergebenen Fernreisen unternommen, z.B. nach Singapur, Nepal und vor einigen Jahren nach Goa, wobei an letzteren Reisen nur Jimmy Yogiraj teilnahm, während Gururani zu Hause blieb. Die Journals der Jahre 2006 und 2007 bieten eine ausführliche Gallerie von Reiseimpressionen, die einen gutgelaunten Yogiraj in diversen touristischen Kontexten und mitunter auch mit Sonnenbrille abbilden. (Zwar gibt es Bilder von Hotels, Flughäfen, und Seilbahnstationen, Yogiraj und seine Anhänger werden jedoch nie beim Essen und Trinken abgebildet.)

### **Darshan observed**

Da uns keine älteren Beschreibungen von Darshans vorliegen, sind Änderungen im rituellen Format nur schwer zu rekonstruieren. Der Hinweis auf die im häuslichen Kontext vollzogenen “limited darshans” (s. oben) lässt aber ein gewisses Experimentieren und möglicherweise auch kontextabhängige Varianten erkennen. Ein Informant, der erstmals im Jahre 1984 ein Darshan besuchte, teilte uns mit, dass Gururani

<sup>22)</sup> Eine solche Audienz wurde am 19. Februar 2008 spätabends (23 Uhr) auch István Keul gewährt. Bei dieser Gelegenheit sagte Gururani ihm ihre Unterstützung für die Feldarbeit zu; diese Zusage wurde später, ohne Anführung von Gründen, widerrufen.

damals gegen Ende der Zeremonie mit bzw. zu ihren Anhängern gesprochen habe — und genau diese Worte, die er auf seine eigene Situation hin auslegte, waren für ihn seinerzeit ausschlaggebend, seine Zweifel an Gururani aufzugeben (Informant 6 [2008]). Auch andere Informanten erwähnten Ansprachen von Gururani, wobei unklar ist, ob diese im Rahmen von Darshans stattfanden oder bei anderen Anlässen gehalten wurden.

Die Darshans finden in der Regel an oder in der unmittelbaren zeitlichen Nähe von überwiegend hinduistischen und zoroastrischen, aber auch buddhistischen, jainistischen und christlichen religiösen Feiertagen sowie an den Geburtstagen der beiden „göttlichen Lichter“ statt, wobei die letzteren als die wichtigsten Feste der Bewegung gelten.<sup>23</sup> Im Jahr 2008 wurden insgesamt 26 Darshans abgehalten, davon sieben sogenannte „counter darshans“, bei denen Gururani und Yogiraj nicht anwesend sind. Die rituelle Grundstruktur dieser „counter darshans“ entspricht jener der regulären Darshans, bis auf die Tatsache, dass die Throne der „göttlichen Lichter“ leer bleiben. Der Begriff „counter darshan“ verweist auf die Ladentheke (engl. *counter*), auf der Devotionalien zum Verkauf angeboten werden, deren Materialität gewissermassen die körperliche Anwesenheit der göttlichen Hauptpersonen substituiert (s. unten). Zwar zählen diese Theken-Darshans immer noch mehrere hundert Teilnehmer, die Menge ist aber deutlich geringer als bei den regulären Darshans. Die Theken-Darshans finden am frühen Abend statt, wobei man oft Räumlichkeiten in oder in der Nähe von Parel anmietet.

Als Beispiel für den Ablauf eines regulären Darshans, wie sie heutzutage praktiziert werden, soll die Veranstaltung zum Geburtstag Yogirajs am 22. Februar 2008 dienen, an der István Keul teilnehmen konnte.<sup>24</sup> Während die Vorbereitungen hinter geschlossenen Toren noch im Gange waren, trafen gegen acht Uhr abends die ersten Verehrer am Darbar in Ulhasnagar ein. An der letzten Strassenecke vor dem Veranstaltungsort, die ca. 100 m vom Darbar entfernt ist, und an der Strassenschilder mit den Namen Gururanis und Yogirajs aufgestellt sind,

<sup>23</sup>) Auch im Fall der Sathya Sai-Bewegung wird dem Geburtstag Sathya Sai Babas im Jahresfestkalender ein besonderer Stellenwert eingeräumt. Vgl. Srinivas 2008:57.

<sup>24</sup>) István Keul nahm an mehreren Darshans in den Jahren 2007 und 2008 teil. Michael Stausberg besuchte einen Darshan im September 2000.

zogen die meisten ihre Schuhe aus, verbeugten sich vor den Schildern, sprachen ein kurzes Gebet, drehten sich um die eigene Achse und gingen das letzte Stück in Socken bzw. Strümpfen. (Barfüssigkeit ist unerwünscht, was vermutlich ein Erbe des zoroastrischen Körper-Habitus darstellt). Die Ankömmlinge trugen die für die Bewegung spezifische Kleidung: die Frauen Salvar Kamiz oder Sari (mit Kopftuch) und Strümpfe, die Männer ein helles Hemd, dunkle Hose und Socken, Krawatte und die für Parsi spezifische Kopfbedeckung (Topi), hier allerdings aus dunkelrotem oder violetterem Samt.<sup>25</sup> In der Nähe des Eingangs zum Darbar standen Anweiser bereit, die die Anhänger in gleichmässigen Reihen an beiden Seiten der Strasse vor dem Darbar nach Geschlechtern getrennt einwiesen.

Die Tore des Veranstaltungsortes öffneten sich gegen neun Uhr, als bereits ca. 2000 Personen am Strassenrand sassen. Etwa 3–400 fanden im Hof vor der erhöhten Bühne Platz, und diese wurden von einer Reihe von Helfern nach bestimmten Kriterien ausgewählt. Einige der früh Eintreffenden, und diejenigen, die neu hinzugekommen und zum ersten Mal beim Darshan waren, was zum Teil auch an der noch nicht ganz vorschriftsmässigen Kleidung zu erkennen war, wurden bevorzugt eingelassen. Wie in mehreren Gesprächen mit Teilnehmern bestätigt wurde, wird generell darauf geachtet, dass im Laufe eines Jahres möglichst viele einen Darshan im Hof des Darbars miterleben können (eine Art Rotationsprinzip). Einen festen Platz vor der Bühne haben in der Regel die zahlreichen bei den verschiedenen Programmpunkten Mitwirkenden, einschliesslich einer Gruppe Musiker und Sänger. Die fest installierte, ca 6 × 4 m grosse, überdachte Bühne war mit einem grünen Teppich belegt und von vier goldfarbenen Säulen eingerahmt. Schlangen- bzw. Kobramotive waren sowohl an der Stirnseite des Podests als auch an der Wand daneben angebracht. Zwei zusätzliche Säulen vor der Bühne, mit *apsaras* (himmlische Tänzerinnen) verziert, trugen die Inschrift *Janmotsav* (Geburtstagsfest). Der gesamte Innenhof war hell erleuchtet und mit Blumengirlanden geschmückt. Das Licht der Scheinwerfer erfasste auch weite Teile der Strasse, wo die Anweiser darauf achteten, dass die immer länger

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<sup>25</sup>) Die meisten Parsi tragen schwarze Topi.

werdenden Reihen der Teilnehmer gleichmässig blieben und die Fahrbahn nicht blockierten.

Gegen Mitternacht erklang drinnen leise Musik: Von Harmonium, Tabla und Zimbeln begleitet, sangen die Verehrer um Ram Lakshman, den langjährigen “musikalischen Direktor”, Texter und Komponisten der Bewegung,<sup>26</sup> an Gururani und Yogiraj gerichtete Bhajans (devotionale Lieder). Die eingängigen Melodien und leicht erinnerbaren Texte in Hindi wurden von anderen, auch weiter entfernt sitzenden Anhängern aufgenommen.

Kurz nach halb zwei ging ein Raunen durch die Menge. Gururani und Yogiraj hatten ihre Räumlichkeiten verlassen und schritten auf das Podium zu.<sup>27</sup> Gururani war in ein glänzendes, lilafarbenes, zweiteiliges Ensemble (Hose und Oberteil) mit silberfarbenen Stickereien gewandet, Yogiraj in eine lange himmelblaue Kurta und eine an den Unterschenkeln eng anliegende Hose. Beide trugen gelbe Schals um die Schultern und kronenartige Kopfbedeckungen. Vor der Bühne wurden sie von zwei jungen Frauen empfangen, die ihnen farbenfrohe, üppige Blumengirlanden umhingen. Ein etwa fünfzigjähriger, einen hellblauen Anzug, Krawatte und Topi tragender Ausrufer sprach Glückwunschverse in einem sehr klaren Hindi, die von der Menge wiederholt wurden: Möge “die höchste Gottheit” (*mahaparameshvari* bzw. *mahaparameshvar*) Gururani bzw. Jimmy für immer hochleben! Nachdem die beiden auf mit Kobramotiven verzierten, vor einer aus Sperrholz gefertigten, von Lichterketten gerahmten Sonne aufgestellten Thronen Platz genommen hatten, führten mehrere Frauen vor der Bühne ein fünfteiliges, in der hinduistischen Bilderverehrung allgemein verbreitetes Ritual (*pancopacara puja*) durch, assistiert von vier weiteren, in Saris gewandeten Frauen, die *puṇnakalashas*, Glück und Wohlstand verheissende, mit Wasser, Mangoblättern, Reis und einer Kokosnuß gefüllte Messingkrüge auf den Köpfen trugen. Ein etwa zehnjähriger Junge

<sup>26)</sup> Ram Lakshman hat auch in diversen Bollywood-Produktionen als “music director” mitgewirkt und die Musik zu einigen bekannten Filmen komponiert.

<sup>27)</sup> Bei anderen Darshans werden die “göttlichen Lichter” in einem mit Blumengirlanden geschmückten Ochsenwagen oder einem ebenfalls reich dekorierten Auto zur Versammlungsstätte gefahren; die Ankunft des Fahrzeugs ist dann mit einem Epiphangeschiehen zu vergleichen.

sagte auf Hindi ein offenbar für diese Gelegenheit geschriebenes Gedicht auf. Es folgte eine langsame, gut einstudierte Tanzvorführung und weitere im Chor gesprochene Glückwunschbekundungen.

Anschliessend betraten fünf weissgekleidete zoroastrische Priester sowie die Frau eines vor einigen Jahren verstorbenen, zu den Verehrern Gururanis und Yogirajs zählenden Priesters die Bühne, verbeugten sich und berührten ehrerbietig Gururanis Füsse (nicht aber die des Geburtstagskinds, was einen der wenigen Fälle der rituellen Vorzugsbehandlung von Gururani darstellt). Zwei der Priester, die nicht den Turban der zoroastrischen Priester, sondern die für die Anhänger der Bewegung charakteristischen samtrotten bzw. violetten Topis trugen, erregten offensichtlich das Missfallen Gururanis: sie wurden kurzerhand der Bühne verwiesen und mussten während der folgenden rituellen Sequenz in unterwürfiger Haltung am Treppenaufgang verharren. Die verbleibenden drei Priester und die Priesterfrau rezitierten anschliessend Tandarosti, ein zoroastrisches Segensgebet. Kurz nach zwei Uhr segneten Gururani und Yogiraj dann auch die Priester, die daraufhin die Bühne verliessen. Die beiden Verbannten mussten allerdings noch eine längere, für die Teilnehmer vor der Bühne nicht vernehmbare Ansprache Gururanis über sich ergehen lassen, wurden anschliessend ebenfalls gesegnet und gingen von der Bühne.

Der Ausrufer forderte nun die Anwesenden auf, ihre Kopfbedeckungen zu richten, die Augen zu schliessen und die vorgesagten Verse zu wiederholen. Es folgten zahlreiche Lobpreisungen, im Laufe derer Gururani und Yogiraj unter anderem mit den höchsten hinduistischen Gottheiten gleichgesetzt und mit zahlreichen höchstgöttlichen Epitheta versehen wurden. Aus dem anschliessenden langgezogenen "Ooommm!" erwuchs — geschickt gesteuert von den Musikern — allmählich eine Melodie, in die die meisten Anwesenden einstimmten.

Gegen halb drei gab eine langjährige Verehrerin den Termin des nächsten Darshans bekannt und wiederholte dies gleich nochmal: Man trifft sich wieder am 6. März, an Shivaratri. Im Laufe mehrerer Wortmeldungen schilderten dann Teilnehmer ihre persönlichen Eindrücke der vergangenen Tage, besonders auch im Hinblick auf die kurzfristig bekanntgegebene Verschiebung des ursprünglichen Darshantermins (7. Februar). Es wurde betont, dass dies nicht ohne Grund geschehen sei, und sich in vielerlei Hinsicht als sehr sinnvoll erwiesen habe. Alle

priesen die beiden “göttlichen Lichter” für ihre Allwissenheit und ihre weise, fürsorgliche Voraussicht. Die eingangs erwähnten jungen Frauen, die Gururani und Yogiraj auf die Bühne begleitet hatten und ihnen dort im Verlauf des gesamten Darshans assistierten, nahmen den beiden Blumengirlanden, Schal, Tuch und Kronen ab und ersetzten sie durch andere. Im Text des gleichzeitig erklingenden Liedes wurde Jimmy als höchster Gottvater (*parampita*), Gururani als allerhöchster Geist/höchste Seele (*paramatma*) besungen. Während dieser Sequenz, aber auch bei anderen Gelegenheiten im Laufe der Nacht unterhielten sich Gururani und Yogiraj gedämpft miteinander.

Die Musik nahm allmählich Fahrt auf. Die eher leisen Klänge gingen in ein — ebenfalls von Ram Lakshman komponiertes — Geburtstagslied über (“Happy birthday to you, Jimmy Yogiraj, happy birthday to you, Gururani Ma” und in umgekehrter Reihenfolge). Zahlreiche festlich gekleidete, aber auch glitzernd kostümierte Menschen strömten in den freien Bereich vor der Bühne und begannen zu tanzen. Während dort eine (jederzeit kontrollierte) Ausgelassenheit um sich griff, erhoben sich Gururani und Yogiraj von ihren Sitzen und kamen in den vorderen Bereich des Podiums. Sie wurden in goldene Schals gehüllt, mit Blumengirlanden behängt und mit einem Stirnmal versehen. Ihnen wurden eine kronenartige Kopfbedeckung, Ringe (Jimmy), Armreifen und Halsketten (Gururani), sowie Licht, Duft (von Räucherkerzen) und Blütenblätter verabreicht. Die Parallele zur Verehrung von Tempelbildern war wohl intendiert: Den “göttlichen Lichtern” wurden in ihrer Funktion als verkörperte Gottheiten alle rituellen Dienste (*upacaras*) der klassischen hinduistischen Puja bzw. des Shringars (der rituellen Schmückung eines Götterbildes) zuteil.

Unten entluden sich mittlerweile mit lautem Knall mehrere Konfettiböller, Sprühschlangen aus der Dose und Blumengirlanden wirbelten durch die Luft, und eine Nebelmaschine wurde angeworfen. Einige der Tanzenden setzten spitze Partyhüte auf ihre Topis. Auf den Trubel herabblickend, machte Gururani einen eher teilnahmslosen Eindruck, Jimmy hingegen lächelte verschmitzt und fand offensichtlich Gefallen am bunten Treiben zu seinem Geburtstag. Die beiden jungen Assistentinnen beendeten währenddessen die Verehrungssequenzen auf der Bühne mit einer Arti-Zeremonie: Mehrere Male schwenkten sie eine Schale mit Öllichtern vor Gururani und Yogiraj. Weitere Teilnehmer drängten in den Bereich vor der Bühne, um besser zu sehen.



Gegen drei Uhr wurde die Feier wieder in ruhigere Fahrwasser gelenkt. Die “göttlichen Lichter” gingen zu ihren Thronen zurück, die Tanzenden setzten sich, und die Musikgruppe spielte und sang einen langsamen Bhajan. Aus einem Seitenzimmer wurde währenddessen eine mit Kerzen gespickte riesige Schokoladentorte herausgebracht und auf das Podium gehoben. Die Kerzen wurden angezündet und kurz darauf von Gururani und Yogiraj mit energischen Handbewegungen ausgeweht. Dann schnitten die beiden gemeinsam die Torte an. Ausgewählte Teilnehmer durften anschliessend mit auf die Bühne, legten ihre Hände auf Yogirajs messerführende Hand bzw. auf die Hand/den Arm des Nachbarn und wiederholten die Tortenanschneidezereemonie mehrere Male. Die Tortenstücke wurden am Schluss der Feier als geweihte Speise (*prasad*) an die Teilnehmer verteilt. Der Ausrufer stimmte einen weiteren Lobpreis an Gururani und Yogiraj an, und die Menge wiederholte die Verse andächtig. Dann brachte jemand ein riesiges Bündel mit mehr als hundert weissen und roten Luftballons, befestigte sie an einer langen Schnur und überreichte diese Yogiraj. Die nächsten ca 10 Minuten vergingen damit, dass dieser — sekundiert von der eher zurückhaltenden, aber immerhin aktiv ins Geschehen eingreifenden Gururani — die Luftballons unter lautem Beifall der Teilnehmer immer wieder weit hochsteigen liess, um dann die Schnur mit ruckartigen Bewegungen wieder einzuholen. Als er die Luftballons endlich in den Nachthimmel entliess, erklangen laute Hip-Hip-Hurra-Rufe und der Beifall pflanzte sich bis weit in die hinteren Reihen draussen auf der Strasse fort.

Die Veranstaltung geriet nun ein wenig durcheinander. Die Teilnehmer vorn an der Bühne wollten mit einer weiteren Tanzeinlage aufwarten, die Musiker weiter hinten brachen das bereits begonnene Lobpreisungslied ab und berieten sich kurz. Jemand wollte eine Ansprache halten, doch seine Worte gingen im Lärm der sich nur allmählich beruhigenden Menge unter. Bevor ein neues Lied angestimmt werden konnte, gaben Gururani und Yogiraj das Zeichen für die abschliessende Ritualsequenz, die grosse Lichtzeremonie (*arti*). Mittlerweile war es nach halb vier. Aus den mitgebrachten Taschen holten die Teilnehmer kleine Messingschalen, tönernen Öllämpchen mit Docht, Döschen mit Schmelzbutter und Zündhölzer heraus und legten sie vor sich auf den Boden. Ein weiterer Bhajan erklang, dessen Refrain nur aus dem Wort “arti” bestand. Die Assistentinnen schmückten Gururani und Yogiraj

mit Blumenkränzen (um den Hals und um die Handgelenke), setzten ihnen wieder neue, diesmal Tiara-ähnliche Kopfbedeckungen auf, und applizierten neue Stirnmale. Gururani wurde ein kostbar aussehendes Seidentuch um die Schultern gelegt, Jimmy erhielt eine Art goldenen Umhang. Auf der Bühne waren mittlerweile auch mehrere langjährige Begleiterinnen Gururanis (die Matas), die ebenfalls Stirnmale erhielten. Nun liefen mehrere Helfer durch die Reihen und raunten den Teilnehmern zu, sie mögen die Lichter anzünden, was diese auch taten. Vor der ersten Teilnehmerreihe wurde eine grosse Schale mit zahlreichen Öllampen plazierte, und auch auf der Bühne zündeten die Assistentinnen Lämpchen in kunstvoll verzierten Lichthaltern an. Der Refrain “arti, arti” wurde nun ein ums andere Mal wiederholt, und ein allgemeines Lichterschwenken begann: Jeder einzelne Teilnehmer erhob und schwenkte sein Lämpchen, mehrmals im Uhrzeigersinn kreisend, um nach kurzem Innehalten fortzufahren. Die gleichen Bewegungen vollzogen die Assistentinnen auf der Bühne direkt vor Gururani und Jimmy, und zwei Helfer hoben die grosse Schale vor der Bühne empor und vollführten ihrerseits mehrere Schwenks, bevor sie mit der Schale vor das Tor auf die Strasse gingen. Dort sassen in langen Reihen jene, die diesmal keinen Einlass gefunden und daher von den Feiersequenzen drinnen wenig mitbekommen hatten. Ein weiterer Helfer, der den grössten Teil der Festlichkeit gefilmt hatte, begleitete sie mit seinem Camcorder.

Kurz nach vier Uhr war die Arti-Sequenz vorbei. Der Ausrufer rezierte mehrere Sanskritverse, darunter adaptierte Varianten der Gayatri-Hymne, eines Vedaverses. Auf der Bühne hingen die Matas Jimmy eine weitere Blumengirlande um und bewarfen ihn und Gururani mit weissen, roten und gelben Blütenblättern. Die Matas drückten sich gegenseitig Tilaks auf die Stirn, und die Teilnehmer packten die Arti-Utensilien ein. Gururani und Yogiraj erhoben sich von ihren Thronen, erteilten mit der erhobenen rechten Hand allen Anwesenden ihren Segen und riefen dabei: *Ashirvad* ((Unser) Segen), *Khush raho, sukhi raho* (beides in etwa: Möget ihr glücklich sein)! Vom Ausrufer/Vorsager animiert, erwiderte die Menge mit einem Lobpreisungsvers. Viele Teilnehmer berührten wiederholte Male mit der Stirn den Boden und drehten sich um die eigene Achse. Unter tatkräftiger Mitwirkung zahlreicher Helfer wurden alle Anwesenden (an die 3000) der Reihe nach zur Bühne

gelotst und von Gururani und Yogiraj einzeln gesegnet. Am Ausgang nahmen sie die geheiligten Tortenstückchen entgegen und machten sich auf den Heimweg. Diese Einzelsegnungen begannen gegen halb fünf. Für viele Teilnehmer dauerte die Veranstaltung somit an die neun Stunden, wenn nicht länger.

## **Dramaturgie und Epiphanie**

Die Darshans sind das kultische Hauptereignis der Bewegung um Gururani und Yogiraj.<sup>28</sup> Die gewählte Terminologie stellt das Ereignis in den Kontext des hinduistischen Gottesdienstes (*puja*) mit dem wechselseitigen Austausch der Blicke von Gläubigen und den von ihnen verehrten Göttern. Mit ihrem Auftritt geben sich hier die Gottheiten den Blicken ihrer Anhänger frei, und mustern zugleich ihre Gemeinde. Die Teilnehmer müssen zunächst allerdings viele Stunden lang geduldig ausharren, bis die Gottheiten in Erscheinung treten; das Wartenlassen ist kein Akt der Vernachlässigung, sondern markiert einen Statusunterschied, wie er auch im sozialen Leben Indiens allgegenwärtig ist. Es ist schliesslich ein Akt der Gnade, dass die Gottheiten überhaupt auftreten, und verleiht ihrer Epiphanie etwas Arbiträres oder Überraschendes. Dramaturgisch gesehen steigert das Warten die Spannung, wobei es zu berücksichtigen gilt, dass die meisten Teilnehmer schon einen Arbeitstag hinter sich haben, bevor sie auf dem Gelände eintreffen. Das Warten ist von daher eine Herausforderung, was vielleicht aber auch für bestimmte Erfahrungen psychosomatisch empfänglich macht. Dabei gibt es offenbar jedoch bestimmte Toleranzschwellen: Bei einem Darshan im Dezember 2008 zog sich das Warten so in die Länge, dass in den hinteren Reihen schon einige Teilnehmer wieder gegangen waren, als das „Hauptprogramm“ endlich begann.

Insgesamt ist eine Entwicklung hin zum Epiphanieverzug zu beobachten: ein Informant, der nach eigenem Bekunden erstmals im Dezember 1984 an einem Darshan teilnahm, berichtet, dass Gururani und Yogiraj damals gegen halb neun Uhr abends auftraten und der

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<sup>28)</sup> Zum Darshan als „key visual performance“ in der Sathya Sai-Bewegung siehe Srinivas 2008:79–85. Die Darshans in der Sathya Sai-Bewegung sind allerdings weit weniger choreographiert.

Darshan gegen elf Uhr abgeschlossen war (Informant 6 [2008]); ein Darshan im September 2000 endete kurz nach Mitternacht; Tahir Shahs Beschreibung aus dem Jahre 2001 gibt den Zeitraum von 10 Uhr abends bis 3 Uhr nachts für den Hauptauftritt des göttlichen Duos an; in den letzten Jahren verschob sich das Programm immer weiter in die Nacht, wobei die beiden "göttlichen Lichter" im Dezember 2008 sogar erst gegen 4 Uhr morgens in Erscheinung traten, nachdem ihre eifrigsten Verehrer also schon bis zu acht Stunden in der Kälte gesessen hatten. Diese Verzögerung scheint besonders für die beiden Geburtstagsdarshans typisch zu sein, was ihrem herausgehobenen Charakter entspricht.

Während des mehrstündigen Wartens verharren die Teilnehmer weitgehend in unveränderter Körperhaltung an den ihnen zugewiesenen Plätzen. Auch an ihre Kleidung werden bestimmte Ansprüche gestellt. Auffällig ist die Pflicht, Strümpfe zu tragen, was dem Publikum einen gleichsam bürgerlichen Charakter verleiht, ebenso wie die weissen Hemden und Krawatten der Männer, von denen die meisten im Alltagsleben wohl anders gekleidet sind. Eine Parsi-Informantin, die seit 1985 Darshans frequentiert, konnte allerdings auch mit einer symbolischen Interpretation der Krawatte aufwarten: die Krawatte habe die Form einer Schlange, der Knoten bedeute, dass das Böse gebunden und unter Kontrolle sei — eine Interpretation, die vielleicht von der zoroastrischen Ritualschnur (*kusti*) inspiriert ist (Informantin 14 [2008]).<sup>29</sup> Bemerkenswert ist auch die Wahl der Kopfbedeckung, die eine Parsi-typische Praxis (Topi oder auf dem Kopf getragene Taschentücher) für alle Teilnehmer verbindlich macht. Auch die Art und Weise, wie die Frauen ihr Haar mit einem Halstuch drapieren, ist ansonsten Parsi-typisch.

Die epiphanische Dramaturgie wird durch einen musikalischen Spannungsbogen begleitet, der von einem leisen Singen von hingebungsvollen Verehrungsliedern (Bhajans) anhebt, wie sie in der hinduistischen Götterverehrung geläufig sind. Anders als im hinduistischen Götterkult haben es die Verehrer bei diesen Darshans nicht mit Bildern oder Statuen zu tun, sondern mit physischen Personen, die auch direkt und unzweideutig ihren Segen erteilen. Im Unterschied zu den Götter-

<sup>29)</sup> Vgl. Stausberg 2004 zur zoroastrischen Deutungsgeschichte der Ritualschnur.

bildern bzw. -statuen müssen die “göttlichen Lichter” nicht erst noch beseelt werden. Gleichzeitig werden sie allerdings auf mehrere Weise der gewöhnlichen Sphäre entrückt. Das beginnt bereits mit ihrer farbenfrohen und extravaganten Kleidung und der Ausgestaltung der Bühne, oft mit Phantasielandschaftshintergrund, und ihrer Throne, deren Ästhetik Anleihen bei der visuellen Kultur der Bollywood-Mythologien nicht scheut.<sup>30</sup> Wie im Theater werden den göttlichen Akteuren auch innerhalb kurzer Zeit mehrfach neue Kleider angelegt. Sie werden umtanzt, und wie Statuen werden sie an- und umgekleidet und wiederholt geschmückt und mit Blumengirlanden behangen. Die Götter-Inszenierung wird jedoch auch durch Verbalhandlungen vollzogen, in denen sie mit hinduistischen Gottheiten gleichgesetzt werden; der Vorgang gipfelt in der ebenfalls dem hinduistischen Tempelkult entnommenen Lichterschwenkzeremonie, die von einer kollektiven und individuellen Segnung abgeschlossen wird. Die rituelle Aktivität der Parsi-Priester wird aus den zoroastrischen Ritualstätten in die Verehrung der “göttlichen Lichter” verlegt.

Der Darshan bedient sich somit unterschiedlicher zeremonieller Idiome. Neben der mit Bollywood-Elementen garnierten Adaption des hinduistischen Tempelkultes (einschließlich einiger vedischer Elemente)<sup>31</sup> und dem Singen von Bhajans, wie es auch für den Sai Baba-Kult typisch ist, werden auch zoroastrische Priester und deren Rezitation in das Arrangement integriert.<sup>32</sup> Darüber hinaus werden bei diesen

<sup>30</sup>) Tahir Shah schreibt: “A film producer who I met later suggested the duo rented their tawdry mantles from a costume-hire firm in Bollywood. He swore the very gowns had been worn in the popular Indian television soap opera of the *Ramayana*.” (Shah 2001:304f) Das in den Journals abgedruckte reichhaltige Bildmaterial und die Beobachtungen bei den Darshans scheinen die Aussagen von Shahs Informanten zu bestätigen. Nicht nur die Phantasiekostüme der beiden Hauptdarsteller sondern auch jene vieler Teilnehmer an den Geburtstagsdarshans sind durchaus Bollywood-kompatibel/bollywoodesk.

<sup>31</sup>) Anders jedoch als bei Sathya Sai Baba, der seine Verehrer dazu ermuntert, die — normalerweise hochkastigen Hindus vorbehaltene — Gayatri-Hymne dreimal am Tag zu rezitieren, und so zu einer gewissen “Demokratisierung” dieser Tradition beiträgt, erfolgt die Rezitation dieser Hymne bei Gururani und Yogiraj ausschließlich im Kontext der Darshans. Vgl. Srinivas 2008:90.

<sup>32</sup>) Laut *Parsiana* pflegte Jimmy früher die Darshans mit der Anrufung zoroastrischer Figuren zu beginnen: “Every darshana starts with Jimmy invoking the blessings of Shri Pak Iranshah, the Yazads Behram, Sarosh, Meher, besides Ava Ardivisur Banu, Lohrasp,

Geburtstagsdarshans Elemente profaner Ritualtraditionen einbezogen: bei der Geburtstagsfeier des Yogiraj durften z.B. die Konfettiböller und Sprühschlangen nicht fehlen, was etwas an Sylvester erinnerte, ebenso wie die Luftballons, bei deren Aufsteigenlassen Yogiraj eine beinahe kindliche Spielfreude zu zeigen schien (während Gururani eine eher strenge Mimik an den Tag legte und dazu auch noch die Parsi-Priester zurechtwies); das Tanzen und die Hüte verbreiteten Partystimmung, und der Tanz glitt zuweilen in lustvolles Hüpfen über. Zugleich wurde die profane Ritualistik wieder in den religiösen Rahmen zurückversetzt, indem Stücke der festlich, photowirksam und gemeinsam mit ausgewählten Teilnehmern angeschnittenen überdimensionalen Geburtstagsorte den Teilnehmern als geweihte Ritualspeise — eine ebenso im Hinduismus wie im Zoroastrismus heimische Ritualpraxis — mitgegeben wurde.<sup>33</sup> Die Ballons, die Jimmy Yogiraj zu seinem Geburtstag in den Himmel aufsteigen zu lassen pflegt, wurden in einer Publikation (Journal 2004, S. 124) als Materialisierungen der Glückwünsche, Gebete und Wünsche der Teilnehmer gedeutet. In anderen Darshans wurde sogar noch ein weiterer Bogen zur Medien- bzw. Populärkultur gespannt, indem die Teletubbies, Charlie Chaplin und der Nikolaus die Bühne der göttlichen Unterhaltung betraten.<sup>34</sup> Dabei gilt es zu beachten, dass diese Elemente nur für die im Innenhof Sitzenden visuell zugänglich sind, während sich die Draußengebliebenen mit der Akustik der Ereignisse zufrieden geben müssen. Das muss allerdings nicht unbedingt als Benachteiligung empfunden werden. Eine Informantin, deren Deutung der Krawatte oben bereits zitiert wurde, teilte uns nämlich mit, dass sie sich, zusammen mit ihrem Neffen und dessen Familie,

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the 33 Ferishtas, and the 19th century mystic, Ustad Behramshah Shroff" (Rogers 1987).

<sup>33)</sup> In der Photodokumentation des Yogiraj-Geburtstagsdarshans von 2003 werden zahlreiche kleinere Schokoladentorten angeschnitten; das Anschneiden der verschiedenen Torten wird gemeinsam mit kleineren Gruppen von Verehrern zusammen vorgenommen und jeweils in einem Bild photographisch dokumentiert.

<sup>34)</sup> Ähnlich wie im Kontext des Sathya Sai Baba-Kults fügen sich die ludischen Elemente der Darshans nahtlos in Gottesvorstellungen ein, die — obwohl hinduistisch — nicht nur hinduistischen Verehrern geläufig sind: Das Verhältnis zwischen Gottheiten und Menschen wird oft als Spiel (*lila*) konzipiert, und die Verehrer werden zu Spielgefährten der Gottheit. Vgl. Babb 1986:187.

beim nächsten Darshan freiwillig in die hintere Reihe setzen werde, weil dort die Segenswirkung besonders stark sei (Informantin 14 [2008]). Es ist dies offenbar ein lohnender Verzicht.

### Effekte der Epiphanien

Mehrere Informanten beschrieben positive Wirkungen der Darshans. Ein Hindu, der seit 1984 regelmässig an solchen Veranstaltungen teilnahm, erzählte, dass seine Besuche stets die Erfüllung von Wünschen nach sich zogen: “Je öfter ich hinging, desto öfter kamen Dinge, die ich mir wünschte” (Informant 6 [2008]). Eine Parsi-Informantin meinte, ein Darshan in Ulhasnagar sei “das stärkste Darshan in der Welt, wo alle deine wünsche erfüllt werden” (Informantin 14 [2008]). Ein Hindu-Bankangestellter schreibt den Darshans die Wirkung eines gesteigertern körperlichen Wohlbefindens und der Verbesserung des Verhältnisses zu den Kollegen am Arbeitsplatz zu; die Darshans generierten “solace, grace, blessing”, ohne die man im Leben nicht weiterkomme (Informant 10 [2008]).

Die Wirkung der Darshans wird auch in den Veröffentlichungen der Gruppe angepriesen. Ratanshaw Gandhi beschreibt die Darshans in der Publikation aus dem Jahre 1985 als kollektive Heilungsveranstaltungen: er habe mit eigenen Augen gesehen, dass viele Teilnehmer von ihren als unheilbar geltenden Krankheiten geheilt worden seien; Blinde, Taube, Lahme und Gelähmte, Verstümmelte und Bettlägrige seien von ihren Gebrechen geheilt, Bessessene von den sie plagenden bösen Geistern befreit worden, andere hätten Fortschritte auf ihrem spirituellen Weg verzeichnet, und Sünder seien wieder auf den Pfad der Tugend zurückgekehrt.

Einem von Gururani selber stammenden Text aus dem Jahresheft 1985 zufolge (*Satguru Gururani Mandal Annual Day Celebrations*, “Paugam”), zeitige die Gegenwart und der blosse Anblick der “göttlichen Lichter” im Darshan tiefgreifende Folgen, ähnlich wie beim Darshan eines Götterbildes in einem Tempel. Es gebe allerdings einen wesentlichen Unterschied zwischen den gottgleichen Gurus und den Tempelbildern, so Gururani: Götterbilder helfen den Menschen nicht, auf den Pfad zu gelangen, der zur Erlösung führt, Gurus schon. Wie das im Einzelnen erfolgen kann, wird nicht gesagt. Die im Text genannten

Auswirkungen, die ein Guru(rani)darshan nach sich zieht, kommen zum Teil recht konkret daher: Die Teilnehmer am Darshan erlangen seelischen Frieden, unreine Gedanken schwinden, ihre Familie führt ein ruhiges Leben, das Leben erscheint insgesamt lebenswert. Es passieren keine Unfälle, allerhand Wünsche werden erfüllt, Wohlstand kehrt ein. Leidende erfahren eine Linderung ihrer Schmerzen, Krankheiten verschwinden, und auch bei Gesunden gibt es positive Effekte zu verzeichnen: Der Schweissgeruch nimmt ab.

### **Wunder und “heilige Annehmlichkeiten”**

In den Interviews mit den Verehrern wurde für die Hinwendung zu Gururani und Yogiraj nicht unbedingt eine akute Krise verantwortlich gemacht. Einige rekonstruierten ihre Zuwendung mit Hilfe des Narrativs der abgeschlossenen Suche, z.B. nach einem Guru. Andere Verehrer schildern ihre Zuwendung als das Resultat des Eintreffens bestimmter Wunder, besonders in der Form von Heilungsereignissen (eigene Person oder nahe Angehörige). Nachdem die Guru-Beziehung einmal etabliert ist, wird sie durch weitere Begebenheiten bestätigt oder vertieft. Das ist beispielsweise der Fall bei Schutz- und Interventionserzählungen, die z.B. das Vermeiden oder den relativ harmlosen Ausgang von Unfällen der Fürsorge der “göttlichen Lichter” zuschreiben. Ein Informant berichtet, dass er immer sogleich zu Gururani und Yogiraj bete, wenn er im Alltag Hilfe benötige (Informant 10 [2008]). Mehrere Informanten priesen die “göttlichen Lichter” für ihr umfassendes Wissen, das ihnen einen kognitiven Vorsprung verschaffe, an dem ihre Verehrer in gewisser Weise teilhaben können.

Auch materielle Güter, das Erhalten eines langersehnten Arbeitsplatzes oder einer Wohnung, wird ihrer Intervention zugeschrieben, ebenso das unerwartete Zuteilwerden von Leistungen, z.B. medizinischer Art, für die man eigentlich kein Geld hat. Einige Inhaber kleinerer Geschäfte haben ihre Läden nach Gururani und Yogiraj benannt, teilweise als Dank für Hilfe und teilweise als apotropäische Massnahme. All das entspricht der wiederholt betonten individuellen Zuwendung der Gurus, die in Anbetracht ihrer kosmischen Aufgaben mit besonderer Dankbarkeit quittiert wird. Nur sehr wenige Verehrer kommen jedoch in den Genuss einer direkten Verbalkommunikation mit den “göttli-



chen Lichtern”; ein alternatives Medium dazu sind u.a. Träume und Visionen, in denen ihnen die beiden erscheinen.

Das epiphanische Zentrum der göttlichen Wirksamkeit sind die Darshans; eine Informantin drückte dies wie folgt aus: “one must understand that attending the Darshans and thereby absorbing the Divine Waves is a must”. Diese Wellen bzw. die guten Wirkungen der “göttlichen Lichter” können darüber hinaus allerdings auch durch bestimmte Gegenstände vermittelt werden. Diese Devotionalien, bei den Verehrern u.a. als “holy amenities” (etwa “heilige Annehmlichkeiten”) bekannt, können z.B. bei den Theken-Darshans erworben werden. In unterschiedlichen Phasen und unter bestimmten Umständen sind verschiedene Haltungen gegenüber diesen Gegenständen zu beobachten: manchmal freizügig verteilt oder kostengünstig verkauft, werden sie mitunter auch zurückgehalten und nur bestimmten Empfängern vorbehalten. Selbst sehr einfache, mit wenig Aufwand gestaltete Objekte werden von den engagiertesten Verehrern dabei als Träger von göttlicher Kraft und Segen aufgefasst.

Die “heiligen Annehmlichkeiten” lassen sich grob in zwei Kategorien einteilen: Objekte und Publikationen. Bei letzteren sind zunächst Mediatisierungen der göttlichen Epiphanien zu nennen, also Tonbandaufnahmen, Videos oder CDs der Darshans oder auch der (früheren) Ansprachen der “göttlichen Lichter”. In den 1980er Jahren wurden auch Bhajans zu Ehren von Gururani und Yogiraj eingespielt. Darüber hinaus liegt ein Korpus an Schriften vor. Die Publikation von 1985 stellt den sog. Gururani Granth vor, der als die heilige Schrift Gururanis beschrieben wird. Neben der Guruverehrung wird dabei die zu erreichende Balance zwischen Licht und Finsternis, Gut und Böse, Göttlichkeit und Bösheit als der Natur innewohnenden Gegensätze als Hauptinhalt dieser Schrift angedeutet, und die Leser bzw. Verehrer werden aufgefordert, stets den Gururani Granth zu rezitieren. Die Beschreibung macht den Eindruck, als sei die Bewegung hier auf dem Weg dazu gewesen, sich als eine neue Schriftreligion zu gerieren; der Gururani Granth — der Name ist möglicherweise dem Adi Granth nachempfunden — ist allerdings eine Art Phantom geblieben, das zwar manchmal erwähnt wird, aber nicht als Buch erhältlich ist.<sup>35</sup> Die

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<sup>35</sup>) Eine Informantin erwähnte allerdings ein auf Gujarati verfasstes “kleines Büchlein, wichtig wie das Avesta”, in dem die Verehrer lesen sollen.

wichtigste regelmässig erscheinende Publikation aus dem Umkreis Gururanis und Yogirajs ist das „Journal“ genannte, mit zahlreichen Bildern illustrierte Jahresheft. Diese jeweils etwa 200 Seiten umfassenden Hefte sind mehrsprachig gehalten (vor allem Englisch und Hindi, aber auch Gujarati und Marathi) und weisen in den uns vorliegenden Ausgaben der Jahre 1996–2007 inhaltlich eine gewisse Redundanz auf: Bild- und Textmaterial (zu Dasharathabhai Jinabhai, den Eltern, aber auch zu Gururani und Yogiraj) des ersten Drittels der Hefte ist gleichbleibend.<sup>36</sup> Regelmässig aktualisiert werden hingegen das „Editorial“, die Bilder von Geburtstagsdarshans und Wallfahrten der „göttlichen Lichter“ und die Berichte von Anhängern über göttliche Wunder und Heilungen. Den Journals wird Wirkmächtigkeit zugeschrieben: Ihre tägliche Rezitation habe schon zahlreiche „miraculous results“ gezeitigt, und jedem Leser werde bei der Lektüre göttlicher Segen zuteil. Neben den Jahresheften gehören die alljährlich beim Geburtstagsdarshan zu Ehren Gururanis Ende Dezember feierlich vorgestellten Kalender zu den regelmässigen Publikationen. Die farbenfrohen Darstellungen Gururanis und Yogirajs auf diesen Kalendern machen diese zu Verehrungsobjekten, die in den Wohnungen der Anhänger in der Regel an der Wand gegenüber des Eingangs ihren Platz finden. Der richtige Umgang mit diesen Kalendern (Plazierung, Verehrung, Entsorgung usw.) wird in einem der Beiträge des Jahresheftes 1985 dargelegt.

Unter den als „holy amenities“ angebotenen Gegenständen sticht ein bunt-glänzendes, im Durchmesser ca. 5 cm grosses Medaillon hervor („the holy locket“), das eifrige Anhänger gut sichtbar an der Kleidung ihres Oberkörpers festmachen. Darauf sind die Köpfe Gururanis und Yogirajs abgebildet, die beide aus dem Rumpf einer zusammengerollten fünfköpfigen Kobra herauszuwachsen scheinen. Eingerahmt wird die Darstellung von den Namenszügen der beiden „göttlichen Lichter“. Neben den Medaillons gehören Armreifen und Ringe mit Schlangensymbolen zu den wichtigsten „amenities“.

<sup>36</sup> Die Wiederholung bestimmter Bilder und Texte wird im Vorwort des Jahresheftes 1997 wie folgt begründet: „Certain important articles are deliberately repeated every year to enable new disciples and devotees to realise the true divinity in ‘them’, and for old disciples (...) to benefit by further improving their atmic progress“.

## **Guruverehrung im Alltag: Momentaufnahmen**

Die Verehrung von Gururani und Yogiraj beinhaltet kein Gemeindeleben, sondern spielt sich fast ausschliesslich in der individuellen Beziehung zu den Gurus und in den kollektiven Darshans ab. Bei den Darshans sitzen die Teilnehmer weitgehend schweigend nebeneinander. Da viele Verehrer den Weg zu den “göttlichen Lichtern” über Verwandte, Freunde und Kollegen gefunden haben, bestehen informelle soziale Netzwerke, die aber nicht in eine formelle Gemeinde überführt werden. Den einzigen Ansatz eines Gemeindelebens bildet die Vorbereitung der Darshans, an der jedoch nur ausgewählte Verehrer mitwirken. Der engste Kreis um Gururani und Yogiraj, der hauptsächlich aus etwa 15–20 langjährig vertrauten Verehrerinnen und Verehrern besteht, wobei Parsi überrepräsentiert sind, stellt dabei eine Ausnahme dar: sie haben engen Kontakt nicht nur mit Gururani und Yogiraj, sondern auch untereinander. Ausserdem filtern sie die Kommunikation zwischen den “göttlichen Lichtern”, den gewöhnlichen Anhängern und der Aussenwelt. Schliesslich gibt es noch einen in den 1980er Jahren gegründeten Verein bzw. “Trust”, der aber eher eine rechtliche Konstruktion darzustellen scheint, die z.B. die Eigentumsverhältnisse des Darbars regelt; für die Organisation der religiösen Aktivitäten des Verehrerkreises scheint der “Trust” keine erkennbare Rolle zu spielen.

Die treuen Anhänger Gururanis und Yogirajs markieren allerdings auch abseits der Darshans ihre Zugehörigkeit zu den “göttlichen Lichtern” (wenn auch eben nicht zu einer religiösen Organisation), und zwar vor allem durch das Tragen des Medaillons (“holy locket”, s. oben). Männer tragen zusätzlich noch Krawatte, die samtrote, Parsi-entlehnte Kopfbedeckung und oft einen schlangenförmigen Ring und/oder Armreifen. Durch diese Kleidungsmerkmale erregen die Anhänger durchaus Aufsehen: Bei einem der Treffen mit einer Gruppe von Informanten in einem ausschliesslich von Parsi frequentierten Lokal in Süd-Mumbai im Februar 2008 wurden diese vom restlichen Publikum recht interessiert und zum Teil auch amüsiert beäugt. (In einem anderen Kontext bezeichnete ein sehr modebewusster Inhaber eines Antiquitätenladens — ebenfalls ein Parsi — die “Uniform” der Anhänger abwechselnd als Clownskostüm und Gefangenenkleidung.) Während des erwähnten Treffens wurde mehrmals versichert, daß eine

solche Zusammenkunft eher eine Ausnahme darstelle, denn in der Regel trafen sich die Anhänger auf Geheiss von Gururani und Yogiraj ausschliesslich bei den Darshans oder bei den Vorbereitungen dieser Veranstaltungen.

Bei einem anderen Treffen mit mehreren weiblichen Mitgliedern fiel die von der Gastgeberin ostentativ nach aussen getragene Anspruchslosigkeit auf: Alle sassen auf dem Zementfussboden, und zwar jeder auf einem eigenen Tuch/Taschentuch, wie es auch für die Darshans vorgeschrieben ist, in einer Art Vorraum der geräumigen Wohnung, und zum später am Abend gereichten Tee gab es "Servietten" aus Zeitungspapier. Dieser auch bei anderer Gelegenheit beobachtete Habitus steht durchaus im Einklang mit dem Bild, das die Verehrer von Gururani und Yogiraj haben: Auch diese lebten sehr bescheiden, begnügten sich oft mit Wasser oder Tee als einzige Nahrung während eines ganzen Tages, und das trotz der enormen Belastungen, denen sie ausgesetzt seien; dabei würden die beiden ununterbrochen für das Wohl der Menschheit beten und arbeiten. Über der Eingangstür war aussen ein Messingschild mit den Namenszügen Gururanis und Yogirajs angebracht. Nach Eintritt in die Wohnung fiel der Blick als allererstes auf ein Kalenderbild, das die beiden zeigte. Der Wohnraum war auf diese Weise mit Spuren der Anwesenheit der "göttlichen Lichter" durchzogen.

In dieser (und auch in einer weiteren im Rahmen der Feldarbeit besuchten) Wohnung einer treuen Verehrerin aus dem harten Kern der Gruppe war ein kleinerer Raum ausschliesslich für die — früher häufigeren, jetzt immer selteneren — Besuche Gururanis und Yogirajs reserviert. Das Treffen endete mit einer gemeinsamen Lobpreisung der beiden, die in diesem Raum stattfand. Beim Eintritt in diesen Raum rückten alle Anwesenden ihre Kopfbedeckungen zurecht und legten die Hände zum Gebet zusammen. Der aufgesagte Text bestand aus den folgenden vier Zeilen: *Jai Shri Jimmy Yogiraj, Jai Shri Gururani Yogini, Jai Shri Gururani Yogini, Jai Shri Jimmy Yogiraj*. Dieser Spruch wird von den Anhängern während des Darshans, aber auch in nicht-zeremoniellen Kontexten verwendet, und zwar vornehmlich als Grussformel, oder zu Beginn oder als Abschluss einer Tätigkeit, sei es Telefonieren, Essen oder Tee trinken. Das Aufsagen des Spruches beinhaltet als Sprechakt eine kommunikative Identifikation mit den Gurus, die von den anderen Kommunikationsteilnehmern nicht ohne weiteres

ignoriert werden kann. Da der Spruch in manchen Alltagssituationen, etwa bei der Begrüssung von Kunden im Laden, mit den üblichen Kommunikationserwartungen bricht, erhält er eine etwas sperrige Präsenz, die von Aussenstehenden als fehl am Platz und mitunter sogar als unfreiwillig komisch empfunden werden kann. Für die Verehrer hingegen verwebt er fortwährend Alltagshandlungen mit einem Bekenntnis zu den beiden “göttlichen Lichtern”. Zugleich ist an die Funktion als Substitut für andere kommunikative Formeln (z.B. “guten Abend/ Appetit”) auch eine rituelle Dimension angelagert: Er gilt als Lobpreisung und ständiges Dankgebet; darüber hinaus wird ihm eine reinigende Wirkung zugeschrieben. Wie mehrere Informanten versicherten, beseitige der Spruch alle negativen Einflüsse. Das Aufsagen des Spruches gilt als eine Pflicht, der aber vermutlich nur die eifrigsten Verehrer im Alltag konsequent nachkommen. Von seiner Funktion her erinnert der Spruch an rituelle Manthras, die im Zoroastrismus durchgängig gebrauchten Sakralformeln. Die Formel bringt markant zum Ausdruck, dass die Personen der “göttlichen Lichter” zugleich den zentralen religiösen Inhalt der Bewegung darstellen.

Die Einhaltung bestimmter Kleidungs- oder Verhaltensformen kann zu einigem Unverständnis führen. Einer unserer Informanten, ein Haushaltswarenhändler, trug während des Interviews stets ein zusammengefaltetes Taschentuch bei sich, das er erst einmal auf jeder Sitzgelegenheit (ob Bürostuhl, Sitzbank, oder Fenstersims) umständlich ausbreitete, bevor er auf ihr Platz nahm, was von den im Geschäft anwesenden Kunden interessiert verfolgt wurde. Das Sitztuch, ganz klassisch als *asan* bezeichnet, soll dazu dienen, den Körper einerseits vor negativen Einflüssen, die von unten kommen könnten, zu schützen. Zugleich sollen die während eines Darshans im Körper akkumulierten positiven Energien so lange wie möglich konserviert werden. *Asans* wie auch Kopfbedeckungen sollen ein Entweichen dieser Energien verhindern. Es kommt vor, dass besonders eifrige Anhängerinnen der “göttlichen Lichter” bis zu drei dicke Kopftücher übereinander tragen, die sie sogar während ihrer Nachtruhe anbehalten, und das auch während der heissen Mumbaier Sommer.

### **Abschliessende Einordnung**

Bei den Verehrern von Gururani und Yogiraj handelt sich nicht um eine (religiöse) “Bewegung” im engeren soziologischen Sinne, insofern man es — in Parallelität zu den sog. sozialen Bewegungen — als entscheidendes Merkmal von Bewegungen ansieht, dass sie darauf abzielen, “auf der Grundlage einer (neu gewonnenen oder reaktivierten traditionellen) religiösen Überzeugung einschneidenden sozialen und kulturellen Wandel herbeizuführen, zu verhindern oder rückgängig zu machen” (Krech 1999:57f). Eine religiöse Überzeugung jenseits einer Affirmation des Guru- und Gottescharakters von Gururani und Yogiraj ist in unserem Fall nicht auszumachen. Die Verehrung von Gururani und Yogiraj mag ihren Anhängern auf individueller Ebene im Einzelfall helfen, mit sozialem, kulturellen oder wirtschaftlichem Wandel zu Rande zu kommen; solche Wandlungsprozesse werden aber nicht als solche thematisiert. Anders als dies für religiöse Bewegungen typisch ist, konstituiert die Verehrung von Gururani und Yogiraj auch kein “eigenes sozialmoralisches Milieu, das ihren Trägern einen mehr oder weniger verbindlichen Lebensstil vorgibt” (Krech 1999:58).

Die Verehrer von Gururani und Yogiraj sind angemessener als eine (trans)religiöse Gruppe zu beschreiben. Die Verehrer von Gururani und Yogiraj bilden insofern eine Gruppe, als sie unmittelbare, aber zugleich diffuse Mitgliederbeziehungen unterhalten: unmittelbar gegenüber den Gurus, aber diffus untereinander. Zwar gibt es Grenzen und Grenzmarkierungen nach aussen (z.B. die oben beschriebenen Gegenstände und Kleidungsformen), welche die Verehrer von den Nicht-Verehrern sichtbar unterscheiden (und eifrige Verehrer von weniger eifrigen), aber keine formalen Organisationsformen und auch keine formelle Mitgliedschaft. Hinzuzufügen ist, dass nicht alle Verehrer sich exklusiv Gururani und Yogiraj zuwenden; es ist nicht ausgeschlossen, dass sie “inklusiv” an der recht breiten Palette des Angebots von Gurus und göttlichen Akteuren partizipieren.<sup>37</sup> Mehrfach ist uns ein Bezug zu Sai Baba von Shirdi begegnet, wobei die Verehrer darin keine Konkurrenz sahen, sondern eine Identität von Sai Baba und Gururani und Yogiraj konstruierten. Auch werden nicht alle Verehrer,

<sup>37)</sup> Vgl. Warrior 2005:78–82 zu exklusiven vs. inklusiven Formen der Selektion von Gurus.

die regelmässig oder auch nur gelegentlich an den Darshans teilnehmen, eine gleichermassen intensive und enge Bindung an die beiden “göttlichen Lichter” haben.

Gleichzeitig können Verfehlungen durch den vorübergehenden Ausschluss von den Veranstaltungen geahndet werden.<sup>38</sup> Entscheidend ist die bis zur totalen Hingabe reichende persönliche Bindung an Gururani und Yogiraj; “horizontale” soziale Beziehungen zu anderen Verehrern sind, wo sie überhaupt bestehen, von untergeordneter Bedeutung.<sup>39</sup> Dementsprechend kreist die religiöse Kommunikation der Gruppe, deren Zentrum die periodischen Darshans darstellen, um die göttlichen Personen von Gururani und Yogiraj. Ihr Verhältnis zur Umwelt ist ambivalent: subjektiv elitär (man ist im Besitz überlegenen göttlichen Kapitals), nicht an ethnische und religiöse Grenzen gebunden und in diesem Sinne nicht exklusivistisch, auf persönlichen Entscheidungen und Beziehungen aufbauend, werbend ohne missionarisch zu sein, zugleich aber äusserst misstrauisch gegenüber Kommunikation über die Gruppe, die nicht von innen gesteuert werden kann. Dies äusserte sich nicht zuletzt auch während der fortgeschrittenen Phase der Feldarbeit zu diesem Projekt: Bedingt durch die steigende Zahl unserer Kontakte zu Mitgliedern der Gruppe liess Gururani der anfänglich erteilten scheinbar uneingeschränkten Beobachtungs- und Interviewerlaubnis schliesslich ein Kontaktverbot folgen.

Während religiöse Gruppen gängigerweise innerhalb von Religionen, z.B. aufgrund von Migration oder als Abgrenzung von einem dominanten Organisationssektor, entstehen oder “als absichtlich deviante

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<sup>38</sup>) Uns sind zwei solcher Fälle bekannt. Aufgrund von Verfehlungen (Vernachlässigung des Darshanbesuchs, ethisch-moralisches Fehlverhalten) wurde einem langjährigen Anhänger vonseiten Gururanis empfohlen, erstmal eine zeitlang wegzubleiben, damit sich dieser über den Weg, den er zukünftig einschlagen möchte, gründlich Gedanken machen könne, berichtet ein Informant, ein enger Freund des Ausgeschlossenen. In einem weiteren Fall durfte ein Sänger der Musikgruppe (eigenen Aussagen zufolge) aufgrund “gewisser Nachlässigkeiten in Verbindung mit dem Darshanbesuch” eine zeitlang nicht mehr mitsingen. Ihm wurde angedeutet, er müsse sich dieses Privileg erst wieder durch regelmässige Teilnahme und Leistung von Hilfsdiensten am Rande der Darshans verdienen.

<sup>39</sup>) Dieses Strukturmoment wurde auch von Warrier (2005:101) für die Mata Amritanandamayi Mission beobachtet, die im Vergleich zu Gururani und Yogiraj allerdings recht ausgeprägte soziale Interaktionen und Institutionen ausgebildet hat.

Religionsgründung” (Krech 1999:52), handelt es sich hier um eine Gruppe mit dezidiert transreligiöser Ausrichtung. Die Qualifikation als transreligiös knüpft an die übliche Fluidität und Flexibilität religiöser Identitäten an, geht aber zugleich über sie hinaus, da diese hier nicht einfach eine Gegebenheit ist, sondern als solche reflexiv zur Ausgangsbedingung gemacht und dabei überboten wird.<sup>40</sup> Gururani und Yogiraj propagieren Religionskonstanz: sie erwarten von ihren Anhängern, dass sie ihren angestammten Religionen treu bleiben (was für viele Verehrer durchaus attraktiv zu sein scheint, weil sie auf diese Weise ihr mit der angestammten Religionszugehörigkeit verbundenes soziales und religiöses Kapital nicht aufgeben müssen). Da sie für Teilnehmer verschiedener Herkunftsreligionen offen ist, und auch in ihrem engsten Kreise Verehrer mit unterschiedlichem religiösen Hintergrund vertreten sind, kann sie sogar als multireligiöse Gruppe charakterisiert werden. Es handelt sich nicht um eine neue Religion (oder um eine Neue Religiöse Bewegung), zu der man konvertieren kann, sondern um eine (religiöse) Gruppe, die ihren Mitgliedern keinen Ersatz für ihre Herkunftsreligionen anbietet; es ist vielmehr eine in den “göttlichen” Personen und ihren regelmässigen Epiphanien begründete religiöse Leistungsfähigkeit, die sich durch die direkte Intervention religiöser Handlungsmacht auszeichnet. Der transreligiöse Anspruch der Gruppe entspricht insofern nicht nur ihrer multireligiösen Zusammensetzung, sondern auch ihrem Anspruch auf eine Leistung, die Religionen nicht überflüssig macht, sie aber zugleich durch Direktintervention qualitativ überbietet.

Der transreligiöse Charakter der Bewegung kommt in der choreographischen Kombination verschiedener religiös/ritueller Idiome in den epiphanischen Hauptereignissen der Gruppendynamik, den Darshans, und deren Terminierung in Anlagerung an die Festkalender anderer Religionen ebenso zum Ausdruck wie in den Fragmenten ihrer visuellen und diskursiven Selbstpräsentation z.B. in den Journals oder in der additiven Qualifikation des diesseitigen Aufenthaltsortes der “göttlichen Lichter” als “Agyari-cum-Mandir-cum-Masjid”. Die

<sup>40</sup> Gururani und Yogiraj sind natürlich nicht die einzige Gruppe, die in diesem Sinne als transreligiös zu charakterisieren ist; das Attribut trifft z.B. auch auf Sai Baba von Shirdi zu.



Charakteristik “transreligiös” scheint uns dabei einerseits präziser und andererseits weniger ideologisch vorbelastet als die in ähnliche Richtungen weisenden Qualifikationen “synkretistisch” oder “hybrid” (vgl. Engler 2009), die zwar, je nach Interpretation dieser Begriffe, auf die hier vorgestellte Gruppe zutreffen, ohne dass sie Licht auf die spezifische Gestalt und Dynamik dieser Gruppe — und eventuell eines Typs religiöser Gruppen — werfen. Die transreligiöse Charakteristik der Gruppe impliziert ihren synkretistischen und hybriden Charakter — sonst wäre sie gar nicht als transreligiös erkennbar —, geht aber eben nicht darin auf.

Das Vorderglied des Adjektivs erlaubt noch eine weitere metaphorische Präzisierung: Wenn man transreligiös in Parallele zu “Transgender” liest — und dabei Religionen an die Stelle von Geschlechtern setzt —, ergibt sich für den Begriff “transreligiös” neben den bereits beschriebenen Elementen (der multireligiösen Religionskonstanz und der rezeptiven Kombinatorik in der religiösen Kommunikation) für die beiden Protagonisten der Gruppe — Gururani und Yogiraj — die Eigenschaft des Ausbrechens aus den von ihren Ausgangsreligionen vorgegebenen Rollenzuweisungen und die Annahme eines von anderen Religionen vorgegebenen Rollenrepertoirs. Eine transreligiöse Konstellation unterscheidet sich dabei von einer Konversion in Analogie von Transgender und Transsexualität: erstere kommt ohne die für letztere typische hormonelle Intervention und ohne chirurgischen Eingriff aus, um ein anderes Geschlecht leben zu können. Auf den Bereich von Religionen übertragen: Als Transreligiöser wird man nicht wie ein Konvertit resozialisiert und formell initiiert, man wird nicht Mitglied in einer anderen Religion — und kann dennoch aus dem Rollenrepertoire einer anderen Religion schöpfen. In unserem Falle diagonalisierten sich zwei — ursprünglich nur eine — Mittelklasse-Parsi im Laufe der Zeit als Guru-Götter hinduistischer Spielart (zunächst auf Teilzeitbasis), ohne Hindus zu werden. Sie erschlossen eine neue religiöse Identität, einen religionsgeschichtlichen “dritten Raum”. Das transreligiös in Anspruch genommene Rollenrepertoire wird nicht einfach kopiert, was eine Art interreligiöses Cross-Dressing oder Transvestie wäre, sondern kreativ ausgestaltet. Das wiederum kommt gerade auch in geschlechtlicher Hinsicht zum Ausdruck: im Unterschied zu anderen Gurus, Babas, Gott-Männern wie Sai Baba oder Gott-Frauen wie Mata

Amritanandamayi haben wir es hier mit einem Paar zu tun, bei denen beide Geschlechter erkennbar bleiben, die als (unverheiratetes) Paar aber eine Art androgyne Einheit bilden, die nicht in den üblichen sozialen Geschlechterbeziehungen aufgeht.<sup>41</sup> Eine andere Variante einer solchen Konstellation — hier aber mit umgekehrten Geschlechterrollen und wesentlich grösserem Altersunterschied — ist in der Nachfolge Sai Babas vorgekommen. Nachdem dessen Schüler Upasani Baba (1870–1941) einen Ashram gegründet und seinerseits eine große Gefolgschaft um sich geschart hatte, nahm er im Jahr 1928 ein mehr als vierzig Jahre jüngeres Mädchen als Schülerin an. Nach und nach wurde diese als Mata Godavari in den Rang einer gleichberechtigten Leiterin der Gemeinschaft erhoben (White 1972:871).

Weiterhin schlagen wir vor, die transreligiöse Gruppe um Gururani und Yogiraj als einen Kult zu bezeichnen. Wir sind uns dabei bewusst, dass dieser Begriff oftmals, gerade im Kontext rezenter und gegenwärtiger Religionsbildungen, einen pejorativen Beiklang hat, was allerdings, mit Abstufungen, auch für eine Reihe anderer religionswissenschaftlicher Begriffe gilt (angefangen mit „Religion“, womit viele nichts zu tun haben wollen). Interessant an diesem Begriff erscheinen uns seine soziologischen und religionshistorischen Konnotationen. Wie oben gesehen, wäre es verfehlt, die transreligiöse Gruppe um Gururani und Yogiraj als eine Neue Religion oder Neue Religiöse Bewegung beschreiben zu wollen. Der Kult-Begriff verweist demgegenüber gerade auf religiöse Formationen auf einer Ebene unterhalb der der Religion — und gerade daraus ergibt sich die Möglichkeit seines Missbrauchs. In der amerikanischen Religionssoziologie, die auch für Neue Religionen oder Neue Religiöse Bewegungen relativ unbefangen den Begriff *cult* verwendet (vgl. z.B. Cowan & Bromley 2007), bezeichnet der Begriff eher kleine, zumeist kurzlebige, lokale religiöse Bildungen um eine charismatische Führergestalt (Yinger 1970:280), was auf unseren Fall ebenso zutrifft (wobei die Kurzlebigkeit noch abzuwarten bleibt)<sup>42</sup> wie das folgende Charakteristikum: „...cults are concerned

<sup>41)</sup> Unter den sonstigen populären Gurus ist uns nur ein Paar bekannt (Hinweis von Kathinka Frøystad): Shri Kalki Bhagavan (geb. 1949) und Sri Amma Padmavati (geb. 1954), die im Jahre 1977, bevor ihre Guru-Karriere abhob, heirateten; die beiden haben auch einen Sohn.

<sup>42)</sup> Kurzlebigkeit wird ohnehin nicht immer als Charakteristikum angeführt; Nelson

almost wholly with problems of the individual, with little regard for questions of social change and social order” (Yinger 1970:280). Abgesehen von einer Typologie religiöser Sozialformen scheint der Kultbegriff hier allerdings auch deshalb aussagekräftig, wenn man seine religionshistorische Verwendung im Auge behält: die Verehrung einer Gottheit (z.B. Isis-Kult) mitsamt ihrer rituellen Formen, mythologischen Narrativen, ikonographischen Äquivalenten und organisatorischen Verfassung (z.B. Priesterschaften, Teilnahmebedingungen, Infrastrukturen, Finanzierung). Auch bei der Verehrung von Gururani und Yogiraj haben wir es durchaus mit einem Götterkult zu tun: die Darshans sind — wie bereits bereits ihr Name zu verstehen gibt — kultische Ereignisse, die Götter sichtbar machen und ihren Segen übermitteln, wobei das Idiom und Repertoire des hinduistischen Tempelkultes in ein mit anderen Elementen kombiniertes Format überführt wird: filmreife Epiphanien.

Im Unterschied zu wohlorganisierten, internationalen oder sogar globalen Avatar-Kulten oder -Religionen (wie z.B. Sathya Sai Baba oder Mata Amritanandamayi Mission) handelt es sich bei der Gruppe um Gururani und Yogiraj um ein lokales bzw. regionales Phänomen. Abgesehen von einigen Wallfahrten durch Maharashtra und Gujarat sowie einigen Fernreisen, die sich aber eher als eine Form des religiösen Tourismus beschreiben lassen (und jedenfalls keine Missionsreisen darstellen), beschränkt sich die epiphanische Tätigkeit und die Bekanntheit der “göttlichen Lichter” auf Mumbai und nähere Umgebung. Die Gruppe hat bislang auch keine Abstecher in die virtuelle Globalität des Internets unternommen. Sie haben keine internationale Anhängerschaft und unterscheiden sich von daher von vielen der global-aktiven Gott-Gurus. Im Unterschied zu diesen haben sie auch keine leistungsfähige Organisation aufgebaut, und sie verfügen über keinen Ashram. Zwar gibt es auch unter ihren Verehrern wohlhabende Leute, die “göttlichen Lichter” scheinen allerdings eher die untere urbane Mittelschicht

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1968:354 lehnt es z.B. aus empirischen Gründen ab; demnach gibt es auch permanente Kulte. Nelson macht sich seinerseits für das Kriterium eines “fundamental break with the religious tradition of the society in which they arise” stark (ebd.). Das ist allerdings nicht unproblematisch. Im Fall von Gururani und Yogiraj kann man beispielsweise einen Bruch in Bezug auf die Parsi konstatieren, während das für die Hindu-Umwelt nicht zutrifft.

anzusprechen als die aufstrebenden “professionals” der neuen urbanen Mittelschichten; Selbstentwicklung und andere mit New Age assoziierte Themen spielen hier, im Unterschied zu vielen anderen “neuen Gurus”, keine nennenswerte Rolle.

Gleichzeitig ist der urbane Kontext nicht zu unterschätzen: Die Anonymität der Metropolis Mumbai und das gut entwickelte Nahverkehrsnetz ermöglicht vielen Anhängern nicht nur den ersten, oft tentativen Besuch der nächtlichen Darshans, sondern ermutigt auch — kombiniert mit der von den zentralen Figuren gewünschten Kommunikationskargheit untereinander — zur gewissermassen schweigenden, unverbindlichen fortgesetzten Teilnahme. Religiöser Rollentausch und Klientenreligiosität unter Einbeziehung auch moderner, multireligiöser Angebote sind in Mumbai ebenso wie in anderen Metropolen Indiens besonders in den Reihen der Mittelschicht an der Tagesordnung. Die Breite der Angebote, gepaart mit der Neigung zum Experimentieren *in religionibus*, generiert individuelle Religiositätsmodelle, bei denen Herkömmliches mit Neubildungen kombiniert wird. Eine unserer Informantinnen beschrieb ihre “experimentelle” Heransgehensweise an die Darshans mit den Worten: “I thought it was just another spiritual something...” (Informantin 8 [2008]). Selbst im vielgestaltigen Umfeld von Mumbai erregen die beiden “göttlichen Lichter” aufgrund ihrer ungewöhnlichen Rollenkonfiguration als weiblich-männliches Duo ungleichen Alters und aufgrund ihrer exzentrischen, im Kontext von Bollywood aber auch wieder nicht ganz ungewöhnlichen, Erscheinungsformen Aufmerksamkeit. Auch die Gewandung ihrer Verehrer fällt auf, zumal diese zu Tausenden abends oder nachts bestimmte Vorstadtzüge frequentieren, wenn sie zum Darshan fahren oder von dort wieder heimkehren. Abgesehen von seinem lokalen Einzugsbereich weist der transreligiöse Gururani- und Yogiraj-Kult durch das Einbeziehen von Bollywood-Elementen in die Choreographie der Darshans und seine partielle Verortung in Parsi-Milieus einen unverkennbaren Lokalkolorit auf, der der kosmopolitischen “Polytropie”,<sup>43</sup> die für Mumbai besonders charakteristisch ist, eine besondere Nuance hinzufügt.

<sup>43</sup>) Dieser Begriff wurde von Carrithers 2000:834 eingeführt “to capture the sense in which people turn toward many sources for their spiritual sustenance, hope, relief, or defence”.

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## Utopian Landscapes and Ecstatic Journeys: Friedrich Nietzsche, Hermann Hesse, and Mircea Eliade on the Terror of Modernity

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### Abstract

Against the background of fascism and the disasters of two world wars, during the first decades of the twentieth century many European intellectuals were formulating negative responses to “modernity” and to what they regarded as the decline of human civilization. Often, these intellectuals sought for alternatives to the modern *conditio humana* and looked for solutions in religion, art, or philosophy. Friedrich Nietzsche’s conceptualization of the Dionysian and the Orphic is of particular importance for such a discourse of modernity. After introducing Nietzsche’s contribution as a referential framework, the article compares two representatives of this intellectual discourse: Hermann Hesse and Mircea Eliade. At first glance, Hesse, the writer and poet, does not seem to have much in common with Eliade, the scholar of religion and writer of novels. Upon closer examination, however, there are remarkable similarities in their work and their evaluation of the modern human condition. For Hesse, it was art, music, and literature that provided the antidote against the predicaments of modern culture. Eliade shared Hesse’s search for an alternative to the modern condition and found it in the pure religion outside of time and space, in the *illud tempus* of the *homo religiosus*. For him, it was shamanism in particular that provided a model for a contact with the absolute world of truth untouched by the “terror of history.” The article argues that these dialectical responses are part and parcel of the project of European “modernity” itself, rather than representing an “anti-modern” claim.

### Keywords

Friedrich Nietzsche, Hermann Hesse, Mircea Eliade, religion, literature, nature, art, shamanism, ecstasy, intellectualism, fascism, war

## Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth century, European culture found itself in an accelerated process of transformation. In the realms of science, politics, philosophy, art, society, and economy rapid changes challenged the worldviews and interpretational frameworks that had been established during Enlightenment and Romanticism. The optimistic teleological expectations that had characterized the mindset of the larger part of the nineteenth century made place for a much more sober evaluation of the project of modernity. Public intellectuals were part of this discourse. Having been introduced into European languages only in the late nineteenth century, the term “intellectual” carried different connotations in different countries; particularly in Germany and France the term was linked to antagonistic interpretations of national cultures, paving the way for the German *Kulturkampf* during the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> These differences notwithstanding, intellectuals throughout Europe were often united in their critical evaluation of “civilization” and modernity. The catastrophic events of the two world wars reinforced and intensified this utterly apocalyptic diagnosis of the “decline of the West” (Spengler 1999 [1923]).<sup>2</sup> As a response to war, fascism, and totalitarianism intellectuals and artists erected imaginal landscapes and utopias that would serve as a free port for the tormented spirit of freedom, truth, and beauty.

It is these contexts that I want to engage here. Using Hermann Hesse and Mircea Eliade as my main protagonists, I will demonstrate that intellectual utopias and counter-worlds fostered interpretational frameworks that influenced both the academic study of religion and the transformation of religious discourses in general during the twentieth

<sup>1</sup>) See Beßlich 2000; on the emergence of the concept of “intellectual” see Carey 1992; Hübinger 2001 (with its use in Max Weber). On the specific type of intellectual religion see Kippenberg 1989 (on Weber’s notion of *Intellektuellenweltflucht*, or “intellectual escapism,” see *ibid.*:199–200).

<sup>2</sup>) The German *Zivilisationskritik* was a critique of technology and industrialization, but at the same time it applied rules of technology to understandings of nature and the interpretation of the modern *conditio humana*; on these issues see Rohkrämer 1999 who focuses especially on Walther Rathenau, Ludwig Klages, and Ernst Jünger. On Oswald Spengler see Rohkrämer 1999:285–293. On German reform movements see Repp 2000.

century. Over against a modernity that was interpreted as mirroring the worst image of the *conditio humana*, these intellectual utopias set up a land of truth and beauty in which the free spirit could find its dwelling place. While Hermann Hesse projected these landscapes into the metaphysical realm of true art and music, Mircea Eliade prescribed the “other world” of shamanism and the *homo religiosus* as antidotes against the afflictions of his time. Both approaches have been influential and it is not by chance that both Eliade and Hesse — side by side with Joseph Campbell and Carl Gustav Jung — entered the pantheon of the so-called New Age movement.

To better understand the place of Hesse and Eliade within this development and within the triad of art, nature, and religion that informs their contributions, it is important to provide a referential framework for our analysis. And there is no better point of departure for us here than the huge impact of Friedrich Nietzsche.

### **Friedrich Nietzsche and the Triad of Art, Religion, and Nature**

In the discourse that is the topic of this article, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) plays an important role. Nietzsche combines in his work the heritage of Romantic philosophy with an existential questioning of the human condition that was to become so influential in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> With his training as classicist Nietzsche was well prepared to link philosophical considerations with the reception of ancient mythology. In this regard, his interpretation of the Dionysian was of particular importance. As Max Baeumer remarks:

The tradition of Dionysus and the Dionysian in German literature from Hamann and Herder to Nietzsche — as it has been set forth for the first time from aesthetic manifestoes, from literary works, and from what today are obscure works of natural philosophy and mythology — bears eloquent witness to the natural-mystical and ecstatic stance of German Romanticists which reached its final culmination in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche. (Baeumer 1979:189)

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<sup>3</sup>) That is why Jürgen Habermas gives his chapter on Nietzsche the title “Entering Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a Hub” (“Eintritt in die Postmoderne: Nietzsche als Drehscheibe”; see Habermas 1998:104–29).



When Nietzsche began to study Dionysus he could make use of interpretational frameworks of this god's role in the ancient world — usually in relation to Orpheus and Apollo — that were well established in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The link between Orpheus and Dionysus was an ambivalent one; some regarded Orpheus as a follower of the Thracian god, some as his antipode because he took on the characteristics of Apollo. Jane Harrison thus remarked: “Orpheus reflects Dionysus, yet at almost every point seems to contradict him” (Harrison 1922:455). In some sense, Orpheus is related to both divinities. “For Orpheus is truly a reconciler of opposites: he is the fusion of the radiant solar enlightenment of Apollo and the somber subterranean knowledge of Dionysus,” as Walter Strauss notes with reference to J. J. Bachofen and K. Kérenyi.<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche's own theory is ambivalent, as well: “on the one hand we see in Socrates the opponent of Dionysus, the new Orpheus who stands up against Dionysus”;<sup>6</sup> on the other hand, “the *old cruel pre-Homeric* world [...] still draws its wavy furrow in Orpheus Musaeus and their ascetic priestly atonement. On everything that is to be found there the *Dionysian* stream builds forth” (Nietzsche 1999, vol. VII:404, italics in the original; see also I:121–2).

For Nietzsche, the tension between the Dionysian and what he conceptualized as the Apollonian became the major interpretational tool for ancient history, and even for human culture as such. The basis for this theory is laid out in *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872), which was turned down by his fellow classicists but which was enthusiastically embraced by the composer Richard Wagner. Two years earlier, in his essay *Die dionysische Weltanschauung*, Nietzsche for the first time used the opposition “Apollonian–Dionysian” for his interpretation of Greek tragedy. Here, Dionysus represented untamed nature, a wild and ecstatic cult that had come from “Asia” to Greece. Nietzsche's description of this cult is worth quoting:

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche's claims that he was the first who would deal with Dionysus in a philosophical way were “intentional rhetorical exaggerations” (Baeumer 1979:166). On the importance of Orpheus for Enlightenment discourses on nature and art, see von Stuckrad 2003:66–75; on the context of Nietzsche's Dionysian interpretations, particularly with regard to Victor Hugo, Rainer Maria Rilke, Erwin Rohde, and Thomas Achelis, see von Stuckrad 2003:93–123.

<sup>5</sup> Strauss 1971:18. It is by no means clear, however, whether this reflects the actual historical situation in antiquity.

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche 1999, vol. I:88. In this article, all translations from German are mine.

Dionysian art [...] is based on the play with intoxication/ecstasy [*Rausch*], with rapture [*Verzückung*]. There are two powers in particular that trigger the self-forgotten ecstasy [*Rausch*] of the naïve man of nature — the drive of spring and the narcotic drink. Their impacts are symbolized by the figure of Dionysus. The *principium individuationis* in both states is broken; the subjective disappears entirely against the force of the general-human, even the general-natural that is breaking forth. The festivals of Dionysus do not only create a bond between humans, they also reconcile the human with nature. (Nietzsche 1999, vol. I:554–5)

Hence, the conscious transgression of borders is a central characteristic of Dionysian experience of the world. By giving up their individuality the participants become part of the group community; at the same time they experience the mystical power of nature. Enthusiastically Nietzsche wrote:

In ever bigger droves the gospel of “world harmony” is rolling from place to place: singing and dancing the human being expresses himself as a member of a higher, ideal community: he has forgotten how to walk and to speak. Even more: he feels enchanted and indeed he has become something else. Just as the animals talk and the earth gives milk and honey, something supernatural is sounding out of him. He feels as a god; what used to live in his imagination only, now he feels in himself. (I:555)

For Nietzsche, the strength of Greek culture was the fact that the Greeks did not simply give in to or run away from the existential threat of their social and cultural world by the confrontation with the Dionysian cult from Asia — the “raw unleashing of the lower drives” that is “a pan-Hetarian animal life” (I:556) — but that they brought the Dionysian into a rational order. “It was the Apollonian people that put the all-superior instinct in the chains of beauty” (I:558). Greek rationality (*Geist*) is a sublimation of the driving force of the Dionysian melting with nature; the Greeks had cast their emotions into the form of the tragedy, which would become the highest refinement of the *conditio humana*. What started as a threat had developed into an enormous cultural power because it was dialectically turned into art.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* Nietzsche exclaimed: “And forsooth! Apollo

<sup>7</sup> The philosophy of nature as part of this dialectic, implying a philosophy of life, may stem from Schelling; see Kein 1935.

could not live without Dionysus! The ‘Titanic’ and the ‘Barbaric’ in the end were just as necessary as the Apollonian!” (I:40)

There can be no doubt that due to his antipathy against the bourgeois attitudes of the academic world Nietzsche had a strong preference for the Dionysian. But ultimately he was looking for a synthesis on a higher level.

In this composite Nietzschean deity, Apollo, it is true, more and more loses his name to the other god, but by no means the power of his artistic creativeness, for ever articulating but the Dionysian chaos in distinct shapes, sounds and images, which are Dionysian only because they are still aglow with the heat of the primeval fire. (Heller 1952:109)

In the Apollonian Nietzsche saw the rational clarity that comes from the sphere of the dream — together with ecstasy (*Rausch*) the second basic condition of true art. “Apollo, as the god of all creational powers, is at the same time the divinizing god. He, with his root meaning ‘the shining one,’ the god of light, also rules over the beautiful appearance of the world of fantasy” (I:27). This does not refer to the deceptive appearance of dreams but to the clarity of sight that sees the truth behind the veil. As an explanation, Nietzsche made use of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. In *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819), Schopenhauer had described a “Will” that acts at a deep and hidden level in history, and that as the ultimate mover of life is responsible for everything in the world. The Will, then, objectifies itself in the acting of nature, as well as in the acts of human beings. It can be experienced particularly in music because music is the direct objectification of the World’s Will in man.

Hence, Nietzsche extrapolated from an historical situation in antiquity — to be sure, a situation full of imaginative projections — the basic condition of human existence. Dionysus becomes the Dionysian, Apollo becomes the Apollonian.

In summer 1870, with the revaluation of the stylistic characteristics of art — the Apollonian and the Dionysian — into metaphysical powers of life, Friedrich Nietzsche made the decisive step in his intellectual biography. From now on he held the key in his hand that he thought he could use to understand the trade secret of cultures, their history, and future. (Safranski 2000:59)

Or, as Walter Kaufmann puts it: “For Nietzsche a meta-historical perspective was at stake” (Kaufmann 1982:178).

We have seen already that Nietzsche, like Schopenhauer and other Romantics, found the essence of the world in music. Music was the link to the ultimate primordial reality which he now tried to conceptualize with the Dionysian. While in antiquity the Apollonian refinement of the wild rage and the sublimation of the animal drive in man was the task of the tragedy, in his own epoch Nietzsche found a similar task realized in the musical dramas of Richard Wagner. Wagner’s projects offered a true experience of art and an antidote against the increasing intellectualism and commercialization of music in the nineteenth century (see Kruse 1987:287–293; Safranski 2000:79–103). Of course, this experience of music must not be mixed up with simple pleasure of listening; it means listening to the “ventricle of the World’s Will” (“Herzkammer des Weltwillens”; see Nietzsche 1999, vol. I:135). This music does not aim at superficial beauty but at making contact with the “monstrous” (“das Ungeheure”) and the “deep.” To his close friend Erwin Rohde Nietzsche wrote on 28 October 1868, after having listened to the overture of Wagner’s *Meistersinger*: “Every fiber, every nerve twitched; for a long time I haven’t had such a long-lasting feeling of rapture [*Entrücktheit*]” (Nietzsche 1923:58). “*Entrückung*,” “*Extase*,” “*Rausch*”: these are the three terms that not only for Schopenhauer and Nietzsche but subsequently also for Rohde and others became the master key for interpreting Greek “irrationalism” (see von Stuckrad 2003:96–116).

Shortly after his experience with the *Meistersinger* Nietzsche got in touch with Wagner and began to present the latter’s music — until the end of their friendship in 1878 — as the quintessential example of the Dionysian-Apollonian initiation. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie* he wrote: “The tragedy sucks the highest orgiastic feeling of music into itself” (“Die Tragödie saugt den höchsten Musikorgiasmus in sich hinein”; I:134) — a sentence, by the way, that predates the notion of “peak experience” by almost one hundred years. In contrast to those who stick to the surface of music and stylize that experience as a “pleasure of art” (“*Kunstgenuss*”) — a species of bourgeois people he was to meet at the *Bayreuther Festspiele* — Nietzsche addresses those who, like himself, have “music as their native language”:

To those real musicians I pose the question whether they can imagine someone who would be able to perceive the third act of ‘Tristan and Isolde’ without any aid of text and image, simply as an incredible symphonic movement, and who would not breath out his life in a cramp-like spreading of all wings of his soul [*ohne unter einem krampfartigen Ausspannen aller Seelenflügel zu verathmen*]? Someone who put his ear at the ventricle of the World’s Will, who felt the raging desire for being [*das rasende Begehren zum Dasein*] as a roaring river or as a most sublime creek pouring into all veins of the world — and who would not immediately break? Someone who would endure to hear, in the poor glass cover of the human individual, the echo of countless cries of lust and pain from the ‘wide space of the worlds’ night’ — and who would not at such a shepherd’s round-dance of metaphysics flee inescapably to his original home? [*Er sollte es ertragen, in der elenden gläsernen Hülle des menschlichen Individuums, den Wiederklang zahlloser Lust- und Weherufe aus dem „weiten Raum der Weltenmacht“ zu vernehmen, ohne bei diesem Hirtenreigen der Metaphysik sich seiner Urheimat unaufhaltsam zuzuflüchten?*] (I:135–6)

These sentences mark the red thread that links Romanticism to early twentieth-century German literature, such as Thomas Mann’s *Tod in Venedig* and Hermann Hesse’s *Das Glasperlenspiel*, a link that I will explore in the next section. It is important to note that Nietzsche in his later works tried to overcome the closeness to Romantic metaphysics by accepting only the “will for power” (“*Wille zur Macht*,” the continuation of the “raging desire for being”) as the basic motive of all being. But with this tactic Nietzsche could not solve the problem that he himself ontologized as a category what was not verifiable empirically. “He gives the monstrous a face, and what is more: he pushed a *causa prima* under it. This is exactly what Nietzsche wanted to avoid” (Safranski 2000:300–1, with reference to Nietzsche 1999, vol. VI:97).

Although there can be no doubt that Nietzsche gave important new impulses to the philosophy of the late nineteenth century, he stood with one foot in the Romantic tradition. This is also true for the Orphic discourse of the time. With his combination of art, music, and the look into the “true reality” beyond the deceptive surface Nietzsche walked well-trodden paths. An example of this is his description of the “two worlds” that he derived from his interpretation of the Pre-Socratics — a world of deception on the one hand, and an invisible “real” world on the other. The real world, however, must not be interpreted idealistically, but as the working of the ultimate real. Here, Heraclites’

duality, as Hubert Cancik notes, “is lifted in a ‘polar monism’” (Cancik 1995:76).

The role of nature also belongs to this discursive texture. I have already noted that the Dionysian festivals marked a reunion of the human with primordial nature.<sup>8</sup> In his fourth *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung* Nietzsche elaborated this aspect. About the music of the “German masters” he wrote:

This music is a return to nature, and at the same time it is purification and transformation of nature; because in the soul of the most loving human beings the necessity for such a return emerged, and *nature that is transformed into love is sounding in their art* (Nietzsche 1999, vol. I:456, italics original).

But we should not conclude that Nietzsche is arguing for a Romantic understanding of nature that looks for an emotional unity with the love of the cosmos. For him, nature needs purification through music because in its basic state nature is pure dreadfulness.<sup>9</sup> Although the “deeper human beings [...] in all periods have felt pity with animals exactly because they suffered from life and yet did not have the power to turn the thorn of pain against themselves and to understand their life metaphysically” (I:377), this compassion is more the pain that comes from the awareness of man’s own animal condition, an awareness of the fact that the human being only in rare and distinguished moments is able to transcend the “horizon of the animal”:

It is as if man is intentionally formed back and is cheated out of his metaphysical precondition; even as if nature, after having longed for man and having worked on him for so long, now shudders back from him and prefers to go back into the unconsciousness of the drives. O, nature needs understanding but is terrified of the understanding that it actually needs. (I:378–9)

<sup>8</sup>) Habermas, who discusses the continuities as well as the discontinuities between Nietzsche and the Romantics, says with regard to Nietzsche’s understanding of art: “Art opens the way to the Dionysian only at the price of ecstasy — at the price of painful de-differentiation, the overcoming of the individual’s borders [*Entgrenzung*], the melting with an amorphous nature both inside and outside” (Habermas 1998:117). On the reception of this discourse in modern Western shamanism see von Stuckrad 2002.

<sup>9</sup>) That is why Nietzsche in his first *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung* strongly attacks David Friedrich Strauß (see Nietzsche 1999, vol. I:193–200).

Even if we sometimes may think that it is “more necessary not to gather our thoughts” (I:379), Nietzsche points out that a memory of that state of understanding is still present within us. That memory can be regained through the influence of distinguished people. “These are the real *human beings, those not-any-longer animals, the philosophers, artists, and saints*; at their appearance and due to their appearance nature, which never jumps, makes its only leap — that is a jump for joy” (I:380, italics original). Consequently, nature comes to its teleological destination in human consciousness, even if that consciousness remains broken because of the impossibility to really contain the monstrous in it.

This conception had an enormous impact in the twentieth century. Though simplifying matters a bit, Safranski is right when he concludes: “Nietzsche’s ‘Dionysus,’ Heidegger’s ‘Being’ [*Sein*], and Adorno/Horkheimer’s ‘nature’ are different names for the same thing — for the monstrous [*das Ungeheure*]” (Safranski 2000:360). But with reference to the cultural discourse of modernity we can add another dimension of Nietzsche’s impact, namely the ambivalence of the post-Enlightenment philosophy that Odo Marquard described as follows:

*In the context of the ‘depotentialization of transcendental philosophy’ the decline of the aesthetic approach, i.e. the disenchantment of the Romantic nature, means the empowerment of the instinct nature. As a consequence of this fate of the transcendental approach reason and Self are bowing to exactly that non-Self which they wanted to conquer the most. (Marquard 1987:209, italics original)*

By way of conclusion, we can say that Friedrich Nietzsche had a marked influence on the shamanic-Orphic discourse of modernity because he offered a new interpretational framework to the reception of ancient Greek mythology. His concept of the ecstatic *Rausch* by means of music, the function of the ego that transgresses its boundaries and enters the absolute and the monstrous, ultimately becoming the Self, and finally his philosophy of nature provided subsequent generations with a key for interpreting the metaphysical dimensions of reality, music, and shamanism. These interpretational schemes entered the intellectual discourse of the first half of the twentieth century; their traces can be seen in literature, as well as in the academic study of religion.

## Hermann Hesse and the Laughter of the Immortal

Hermann Hesse (1877–1962) belongs to the leading intellectuals who explicitly reflected on the societal, political, and cultural transformations that shook Europe during the first half of the twentieth century. Throughout his mature work, Hesse wrestled with the consequences of totalitarianism and fascism and tried to find an antidote against the horrors of his time. It is particularly in *Der Steppenwolf* and in his late masterpiece *Das Glasperlenspiel* that he formulated his utopia of purity, beauty, and truth. An analysis of these novels will reveal how Hesse contributed to the dialectical discourse of terror and the search for eternal truth that united many intellectuals of his generation.

### Der Steppenwolf

In his novel *Der Steppenwolf*, first published in 1927, Hermann Hesse presents the life of an intellectual who is trying to find an exit from a world that is ruled by superficiality, terror, and loneliness. The protagonist, Harry Haller (H. H., maybe a reference to Hermann Hesse himself), finds inside his own soul the truth of the world which he has to accept — despite the longing for death and his disgust for the “surface” — before he can ultimately enter the world of perfection and immortality. Hermine who, like Harry, has “one dimension too much,”<sup>10</sup> becomes the mirror of his own soul, the dangerous depths of which he consciously has to plumb before he can put the pieces of his personality together again and to enter the land of eternity. About this understanding he says:

My soul breathed again, my eye saw again, and for a few moments I glowingly began to understand that I only have to pull together the shattered world of images, that I only have to turn my Harry Haller Steppenwolf life into a complete picture, in order to enter the world of images myself and to become immortal. Wasn't this the goal that every human life attempted to reach?<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Hesse 1974:165; see also p. 183. One may compare this notion with the poem “Entgegenkommen” that is printed in *Das Glasperlenspiel*. In that poem Hesse ironically suggests to simply cut one dimension to avoid the danger of understanding the deeper truth: “Denn sind die Unentwegten wirklich ehrlich, / Und ist das Tiefensehen so gefährlich, / Dann ist die dritte Dimension entbehrlich” (Hesse 1972:473).

<sup>11</sup> “Meine Seele atmete wieder, mein Auge sah wieder, und für Augenblicke ahnte ich



The home of the soul — and here Hesse writes in a Platonic way — is beyond space and time. As Hermine points out:

It is the realm beyond time and deception [*Schein*]. There we belong, there is our home, there our heart yearns for, Steppenwolf, and therefore we long for death. [...] O Harry, we have to toddle through so much dirt and nonsense to come home! And we have nobody to guide us, our only guide is homesickness. (Hesse 1974:168)

Thus, Hermine lets Harry Haller see “the sacred beyond, the eternal, the world of everlasting value, of divine substance” (“[d]as heilige Jenseits, das Zeitlose, die Welt des ewigen Wertes, der göttlichen Substanz”; 1974:169). It is this world on which his life is focused and yet he can reach it only by acknowledging that the world’s horrors are his own and by learning to laugh about them. The “laughter of the immortal” (“das Lachen der Unsterblichen”), particularly the laughter of Mozart, becomes the icon of the soul’s return to its eternal home. “And ‘eternity’ was nothing else than the redemption from time, a kind of return to innocence, a retransformation into space” (1974:169). These sentences reveal the close links between Hermann Hesse and Mircea Eliade, two intellectuals who longed for an escape from history into the eternal land of truth. Alluding to the political reality in Germany and to the increasing radicalization after World War I, already in 1927 Hesse lets his protagonist prophecy:

Two thirds of my compatriots read this kind of newspapers, read every morning and every evening these tunes, and every day they are worked on, warned, incited, made unhappy and angry. And the end and aim of this all is another war, is the next, coming war that will be even more dreadful than this one. (1974:129)

The fictitious editor of the *Steppenwolf* makes clear in his introduction that the “illness of the soul” (*Seelenkrankheit*) that tortures Harry Haller is “not the quirk of an individual but the sickness of the time itself, the

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glühend, daß ich nur die zerstreute Bilderwelt zusammenzuraffen, daß ich nur mein Harry Hallersches Steppenwolfleben als Ganzes zum Bilde zu erheben brauche, um selber in die Welt der Bilder einzugehen und unsterblich zu sein. War denn nicht dies das Ziel, nach welchem jedes Menschenleben einen Anlauf und Versuch bedeutete?” (Hesse 1974:155).

neurosis of the generation Haller belongs to, and that affects by no means only the weak and inferior individuals but especially the strong, most intelligent, most gifted.” Therefore, the *Steppenwolf* is “a document of the time” (1974:27).

Harry Haller embarks on a journey through the imaginary world of his interior self. The novel uses the image of the “magic theater” to allude to that journey. The theater is shown to Harry by Pablo, a musician who is superficial at first sight but who actually belongs to those artists that have ascended to immortality. Pablo addresses Harry in an interesting way:

You are longing to leave this time, this world, this reality, and to enter into another reality that is more suitable for you, a world without time. Do that, dear friend, I am inviting you. In the end, you know already where this world is hidden, that it is the world of your own soul you are searching for. Only inside of yourself this other reality exists that you are yearning for. I can give you nothing that would not already exist inside yourself, I can open for you no other room of images than that of your soul. (1974:190–1)

The outer landscapes in the *Steppenwolf* are mirrors of inner landscapes.<sup>12</sup> Very similar to the concepts prominent in modern esotericism — therefore it is small wonder that Hermann Hesse is highly esteemed by the so-called New Age movement — we see a tendency to regard the exterior world as deceptive surface and to construct the internal parallel worlds as the ultimate realm of truth and understanding. “The premise is that the unconscious holds the answer to all questions,” as Wouter J. Hanegraaff (1996:255) notes. With reference to the movement of transpersonal psychology he concludes that those worlds of angels and demons can be seen as realms of the human unconscious; “this collective unconscious is in turn identified as an objective transpersonal realm accessed in the holotropic mode of consciousness. This is how the ‘gods’ that seemed to have been banned from heaven reappear — without losing any of their power — from the depths of the human psyche” (Hanegraaff 1996:252).

<sup>12)</sup> For other examples of this literary motif — from Karl Philipp Moritz’s *Anton Reiser* to the “New Wave” in Science Fiction — see von Stuckrad 2003:257–63.

To be sure, Hesse — or Eliade — did not take the step of the transpersonal psychologists. Harry Haller's interior worlds cannot serve as a model for the collective unconscious, quite the contrary: they represent the world of the spirit, or *Geist*, that is only accessible to people "with one dimension too much." Therefore, the appropriation of Hesse by the New Age movement is ultimately based on a misinterpretation. But the *Steppenwolf* is a good example of the Platonizing line of tradition in Western culture that assumes the existence of parallel worlds and engages their mutual relation and mirroring.<sup>13</sup> It is this *Reich des Geistes* that Hesse envisioned as the antidote to the terror of history.

### Das Glasperlenspiel

In his late masterpiece *Das Glasperlenspiel*, published in 1943, Hesse brought this line of thought to fruition. After having worked on the novel between 1930 and 1942, Hesse himself regarded *The Glass Bead Game* as the sum of his writings. That he dedicated the work to the "Oriental Travelers" (*Morgenlandfahrer*) makes it clear from the outset that the author addresses the transhistorical community of intellectual seekers, artists, and musicians that were the heroes of earlier works such as *Der Steppenwolf* or *Die Morgenlandfahrt* (1932). The Glass Bead Game is a symbol of the highest form of intellectual realization, in which the "cult of music" plays a significant role. "With this cult of music ('in eternal transformations the secret power of song is greeting us here on earth' — Novalis) the Glass Bead Game is closely related" (Hesse 1972:15). Programmatically Hesse notes as the "editor" of the book:

The pose of classical music means: knowledge of humanity's tragedy, acceptance of the human fate, bravery, cheerfulness! Whether this is the grace of a minuet by Händel or Couperin, or the sensuality that is transformed into a tender pose such as with many Italians or with Mozart, or the quiet, composed acceptance of dying such as with Bach, there is always a 'despite,' a courage for death, a knightly manner, a sound of superhuman laughter in it, of immortal cheerfulness [*von unsterblicher Heiterkeit*]. Such should be the sound of our Glass Bead Game, as well as of our entire life, activity, and suffering. (1972:44; see also pp. 84, 347, 418–9, and 518)

<sup>13</sup>) On the Platonism in *Das Glasperlenspiel* see also Götz 1978.

The Glass Bead Game offers a direct way to the revelation of eternal truth. At times, this is turned into highly esoteric language:

Suddenly I understood that in the language, or at least in the spirit of the Glass Bead Game, in fact everything meant everything, that every symbol and every combination of symbols did not lead to this place or that place, not to single examples, experiments, or proofs, but into the center, into the secret and the interior of the world, into primordial knowledge [*Urwissen*]. Every change from major to minor in a sonata, every transformation of a mythos or a cult, every classical, artistic formulation was, as I understood in the flash of that moment, considered really meditatively, nothing else than the direct way into the interior of the world's secret, where in the movement of inhaling and exhaling, between heaven and earth, between Yin and Yang the sacred is happening eternally [*sich ewig das Heilige vollzieht*].<sup>14</sup>

It is impossible to discuss the many dimensions of *Das Glasperlenspiel* in detail here.<sup>15</sup> What is important for my argument is the fact that Hesse imagined the world of the Glass Bead Game as a powerful alternative to the intellectual situation of the modern world in general, and the totalitarian and fascist political climate of his time in particular. Hesse acknowledged that fact in a number of letters. To Salome Wilhelm he wrote on 27 January 1947: "I was sufficiently protected against the actual reality as long as I worked on the *Glasperlenspiel*, as long as I could retreat into this work as into an inviolable magical space [...]" (Michels 1973/1974, vol. I:275). Eight years later he confessed:

In order to create a space in which I could find refuge, refreshment, and courage to face life, it was not sufficient to conjure up a bygone past and to depict it lovingly [...]. Despite the sneering present times I had to make visible the realm of the spirit and the soul as existent and undefeatable; thus, my poetry became a utopia, the image was projected onto the future, the terrible present was banned into an endured past. [*Ich mußte, der grinsenden Gegenwart zum Trotz, das Reich des Geistes und der Seele als existent und unüberwindlich sichtbar machen, so wurde meine Dichtung zur Utopie, das Bild wurde in die Zukunft projiziert, die üble*

<sup>14</sup>) 1972:125. See also the poem *Das Glasperlenspiel*, included in the novel, that expresses the same idea and that ends with the verses: "Sternbildern gleich ertönen sie kristallen, / In ihrem Dienst ward unserm Leben Sinn, / Und keiner kann aus ihren Kreisen fallen, / Als nach der heiligen Mitte hin" (1972:484).

<sup>15</sup>) For the background and interpretation of the novel see particularly Michels 1973/1974; Pfeifer 1977; Bartl 1996:93–154; Seeger 1999; Zimmermann 2002.

*Gegenwart in eine überstandene Vergangenheit gebannt.*] (Letter to Rudolf Pannwitz from January 1955; Michels 1973/1974, vol. I:296)

Repeatedly in his letters, Hesse referred to the intellectual line of thought that was particularly strong in German Romanticism and that built on the Platonic tradition, envisioning the “land of truth” as the ultimate place of human knowledge.<sup>16</sup> But the concretization of this utopia in novels such as *Der Steppenwolf* and *Das Glasperlenspiel* was only possible against the background of the Hitler regime and the experience of exile — both literally and metaphorically.<sup>17</sup> Hesse envisioned as “Castilia” the intellectual community of the Glass Bead Game; he projected the utopian Castilia into the future as the ultimate escape from the present history.

Such an interpretation of the present *conditio humana* and the search for a realm of truth, beauty, and consolation was shared by many intellectuals of Hesse’s generation. The exiled poet remained in contact with these intellectuals, from Thomas Mann<sup>18</sup> to Carl Gustav Jung and other members of the *Eranos* circle.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising to find

<sup>16</sup> Referring to the *Glasperlenspiel*, Hesse wrote that “there are two or three dozen people for whom my idea was not only fun and pleasure but some sort of air for life [*Lebensluft*], consolidation, and religion [*Religiöschchen*]; and for those few people [the book] was written — and particularly for myself” (letter to Ernst Morgenthaler from May 1934; Michels 1973/1974, vol. I:89). See also Hesse’s letter to Carl Gustav Jung from September 1934 (*ibid.*, vol. I:95–7). In a letter to Helene Welti (dating 28 December 1934) Hesse refers directly to the Romantic authors Novalis, Schelling, and Baader (*ibid.*, vol. I:100) which once more demonstrates the intellectual framework that I am using for my interpretation.

<sup>17</sup> On *Das Glasperlenspiel* as an *Exilroman* see Bartl 1996:142, with a revealing comparison between Hesse’s novel and Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg*. For the argument of the present article, I also refer to Robert Ellwood’s conclusion that “the fundamental motif of Eliade’s life, certainly after 1945, but really all the way through, was the theme of exile” (Ellwood 1999:97).

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Mann’s role in this discourse is beyond the scope of this article. On his ideas of *Kultur* vs. *Zivilisation*, his speculations about “the new generation beyond modernity” (1909) and his vision of “an Apollonian ecstasy” (1914) see Beßlich 2000:162–191.

<sup>19</sup> On Hesse’s friendship with C. G. Jung — Hesse underwent an analysis with Jung in 1920 and he was actively involved in the Asconan counterculture — see Noll 1994:233–8 (“Hermann Hesse’s Initiation into Wotan’s Mysteries”). On the *Eranos* circle, see Wasserstrom 1999 and Hakl 2001.

many parallels between Hermann Hesse and Mircea Eliade, to whom I now turn.

### Mircea Eliade and the Escape from History

Much has been written on Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), Romanian author and intellectual, who became one of the most influential scholars of religion in the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> Eliade's oeuvre is characterized by a remarkable plurality of genres, comprising academic, literary, and biographical publications. Because the genres are intertwined they should not be studied separately. It was Eliade himself who noted that such an "oscillation between research of a scientific nature and literary imagination"<sup>21</sup> had always been of crucial importance for him.

This oscillation partly originates in the very topic that can be seen as the center of gravitation of Eliadean thinking — a metaphysical interpretation of history that often transgresses the boundaries of academic argumentation.<sup>22</sup> Already in his small study *Le mythe de l'éternel retour: archétypes et répétition* (1949), on which he started to work in May 1945 when Europe faced the horrors of the Second World War, he argued for the generalization of archaic concepts of history. In the preface to the French edition that he wrote in 1952 he expressed his conviction that "it is justifiable to read in this depreciation of history (that is, of events without transhistorical models), and in this rejection of profane, continuous time, a certain metaphysical 'valorization' of human existence" (Eliade 1965:ix). There can be no doubt that this is a reaction to the horrors of twentieth-century Europe that Eliade experienced directly. In his search for an escape from history into the *illud*

<sup>20</sup> Of the innumerable publications on Eliade, I only mention Dudley III 1977; Ellwood 1999:79–126; Rennie 2001; Allen 2002; Rennie 2007. On Eliade's Romanian roots see Ricketts 1988; on the discussion about his fascist inclinations and involvements see Junginger 2008, particularly Part II.

<sup>21</sup> From an essay published in 1978, quoted from Carrasco & Swanberg 1985:19.

<sup>22</sup> This position is part of a larger development during the first decades of the twentieth century, usually discussed under the slogan of the "crisis of historicism." Space does not allow me to elaborate on Eliade's links with this development in historiography and intellectual culture that was particularly strong in Germany. On the German contexts see Oexle 2007 and Laube 2004; see also Raulff 1999.

*tempus* — described in *Cosmos and History* and other works — he joined the *Eranos* circle and corresponded in friendly terms with Carl Gustav Jung, Henry Corbin, and other intellectuals of his generation who were looking for “religion after religion” (Wasserstrom 1999).

During the same years Eliade also worked on his large study of shamanism, which was published in French in 1951. Mac Linscott Ricketts, a follower of Eliade and biographer of his Romanian years (see Ricketts 1988; cf. McCutcheon 1997:83–4), provides the information that Eliade interrupted the writing of that book on 21 June 1949 in order to start working on a novel. The novel’s Romanian title *Noaptea de Sânziene* (“The Night of St. John”) alludes to this date (Ricketts 1982; see also Noel 1997:30–8). The summer solstice was a turning point not only for the author but also for the protagonist of this long novel that was published in English as *The Forbidden Forest*. The plot that focuses on the main character Stefan begins on this date of the year 1936 and ends exactly twelve years later with Stefan’s “escape” from history, when he and his lover Ileana are killed in a car accident. Between these dates the novel tells the story of a group of Romanian intellectuals trying to keep up the realm of truth and beauty within the chaos of World War II and its destructive face. The narrative is not without nationalistic overtones of a Romania that experienced fresh impetus between the world wars. Stefan — writer, philosopher, and painter — has a characteristic gift to perceive the hidden dimensions of the ultimate truth behind the deceptive superficial world of history.

The entire novel circulates around the topic of history and time, of imaginative spaces and mysterious synchronicities, and of predestination and fate. From the outset it is clear what is at stake for Stefan: “To escape from Time, to go out of Time. Look well around you. Signs come to you from all sides. Trust the signs. Follow them...” (Eliade 1978:25). This time is plagued by persecution, war, and destruction; but beyond the outer history there is a cosmic time without limits. And for some people, like Anisie — saint, magician, and “emperor” — it is only the time of the planetary cycles and the phases of the sun and the moon that is important.

He accepts no time other than cosmic time, and he especially rejects historic time; for example, the time during which parliamentary elections take place, or Hitler’s arming of Germany, or the Spanish Civil War. He has decided to take account

only of the time in which cosmic events occur [...]. He's content to exhaust the significance of each of these phenomena, living thereby an uninterrupted revelation. [...] For him Nature begins to become not only transparent but also a bearer of values. It's not a case of a regression, let's say, to the animal-like state of primitive man. He's discovered in Nature not that absence of the Spirit that some of us seek, but the key to fundamental metaphysical revelations — the mystery of death and resurrection, of the passage from non-being to being. (Eliade 1978:69)

Anisie is the protagonist's metaphysical teacher, giving him lectures about the essence of time and of history that will have an apocalyptic end for humanity in the near future. "Another war will follow this one, and then another, until nothing of all that has been will remain, not even the ruins!" (Eliade 1978:313). But this, Anisie says, is only part of the truth.

[F]or historic man, for that man who wants to be and declares himself to be exclusively a creator of history, the prospect of an almost total annihilation of his historic creations is undoubtedly catastrophic. But there exists another kind of humanity besides the humanity that creates history. There exists, for instance, the humanity that has inhabited the ahistoric paradises: the primitive world, if you wish, or the world of prehistoric times. This is the world that we encounter at the beginning of any cycle, the world which creates myths. It is a world for whom our human existence represents a specific mode of being in the universe, and as such it poses other problems and pursues a perfection different from that of modern man, who is obsessed by *history*. (Eliade 1978:313, italics original)

At this point it becomes clear that Anisie represents Eliade's conviction that humanity has to transform into a new epoch and that such a transformation can happen only after a return to the mythical *illud tempus*. But maybe he felt like Stefan who held a somewhat softer position: "I too dream of escaping from time, from history, someday," Stefan had replied. "But not at the price of the catastrophe you forecast [...]" (Eliade 1978:314).

In *The Forbidden Forest*, Eliade introduces a concrete way to escape from historical time into mythical non-time. Already in his childhood days the clairvoyant Stefan knew a secret chamber that initiates called *Sambo*. This room "was above us, somewhere overhead on the second floor" (Eliade 1978:74). When Stefan dared to open the room he was struck by an experience of enlightenment.



And just then, at that moment I understood what *Sambo* was. I understood that here on earth, near at hand and yet invisible, inaccessible to the uninitiated, a privileged space exists, a place like a paradise, one you could never forget in your whole life if you once had the good fortune to know it. Because in *Sambo* I felt I was no longer living as I had lived before. I lived differently in a continuous inexpressible happiness. I don't know the source of this nameless bliss. (Eliade 1978:75)

In this timeless mythical room of sacred cheerfulness — quite comparable to Hermann Hesse's notion of *unsterbliche Heiterkeit* — Stefan was no longer able to move his tongue; he did not feel any hunger or thirst and he “lived, purely and simply, in paradise” (*ibid.*).

As an adult Stefan hired an additional secret room in his hotel where he could work as a painter. He created mystical pictures, drawn on the canvas but invisible for others, and it is by means of art that he again entered that ecstatic mystical state. “Painting, I had no past” (Eliade 1978:58). At this secret place, time had a different quality. “When I returned home, sometimes very late at night, I seemed to be returning from a journey to a distant place. I seemed to have come from another city where the customs were different and where I met other kinds of people” (*ibid.*). This mode of time, Stefan added, felt more real to him than the time at home or at the Ministry.

Clearly, *Sambo* is a literary adaptation of the topics of ascent of the soul, the contact with the “other world,” the motif of the journey, and the function of art and ecstasy that Eliade engaged in his academic book on shamanism which he was working on at the same time. What is more, the primacy of ascent, making the issue of descent to the underworld a secondary one in his understanding of shamanism, has a clear parallel in his shamanism study. As Daniel Noel puts it: “The escape from history sought by Stefan is an escape *upward*, reversing the ‘fall’ *into* history.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup>) Noel 1997:32. Noel continues: “[I]t is only the elevated spaces of the novel's world that offer any hope of a way out of the history that so tormented Stefan, Ileana, Biris, Anisie, and the other characters — as it tormented their creator and his fellow Romanians in the period between 1936 and 1948” (*ibid.*:34). For a critical response to Noel cf. von Stuckrad 2003:134 note 283.

The novel culminates dramatically with the death of the lovers Stefan and Ileana. The car accident was predetermined long before, but their love triumphs over death. Eliade lets the novel end with the sentence: “He had known that this last moment, this moment without end, would suffice” (Eliade 1978:596). Hence, the Orphic dimension of the triad of love, art, and death is a prominent element of *The Forbidden Forest*, as it was part and parcel of Eliade’s interpretation of shamanism.

It is noteworthy that in his academic book on shamanism Eliade called Orpheus a “‘Great Shaman’: his healing art, his love for music and animals, his ‘charms,’ his power of divination. Even his character of ‘culture hero’ is not in contradiction to the best shamanic tradition.”<sup>24</sup> After having reviewed a number of parallels in the ancient world — from Hermes Psychopompos to Er the Pamphylian — Eliade argued that the “‘situation of man’ remains constant.”

The enormous gap that separates a shaman’s ecstasy from Plato’s contemplation, all the difference deepened by history and culture, changes nothing in this gaining consciousness of ultimate reality; it is through ecstasy that man fully realizes his situation in the world and his final destiny. We could almost speak of an archetype of “gaining existential consciousness,” present both in the ecstasy of a shaman or a primitive mystic and in the experience of Er the Pamphylian and of all the other visionaries of the ancient world, who, even here below, learned the fate of man beyond the grave. (Eliade 1972a:394)

Anisie in *The Forbidden Forest* could not have summarized Eliade’s position more precisely. These sentences by far transgress the limits of historic or scholarly argument. They reflect Eliade’s existential questioning of the human condition after World War II. The Orphic myth was a blueprint for his presentation of shamanism as a technique that is most suitable even for modern mankind to renew its bond with the ultimate reality *in illo tempore*.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup>) Eliade 1972a:391; see also Eliade 1972b:34 where he addresses the “ecstatic experiences of Orpheus” that were “‘shamanic’ in type.”

<sup>25</sup>) On Eliade’s interpretation of shamanism see von Stuckrad 2003:129–135. This applicability of shamanism to modern seekers is a major reason for the fact that Eliade — via Carlos Castaneda and Michael Harner — became an influential source of religious practice in modern Western shamanism; see von Stuckrad 2003:*passim* and Znamenski 2007:165–203.

## Conclusion

The discourses that I have engaged in this article reveal the strong anti-nomian character of European modernity. Rather than describing Nietzsche's, Hesse's, or Eliade's response to modernity as an "anti-modern" critique, it makes more sense to interpret their reaction as an inherent dialectic of the discourse of European modernity. Despite some tendencies in eighteenth-century Enlightenment to prioritize rationality and science, the fascination for an ecstatic approach of ultimate truth and the search for a science that would include the living ontological dimensions of nature have remained as prominent as before, albeit in a new form. This dialectic also generated the interpretational framework of art, nature, and religion that we see at work in Nietzsche, Hesse, and Eliade. Nietzsche's revaluation of ancient myth in the light of modern philosophy served as a blueprint for intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century. The traumatic experiences of two world wars, interpreted as a radicalization of the problematic status of humankind, fostered the search for an alternative utopia in which beauty, truth, and eternal bliss would prevail.

With Hermann Hesse and Mircea Eliade — perhaps less so with Friedrich Nietzsche — we also see that these utopias can take on a concrete form as a "land of truth" and knowledge that can be accessed directly. While Nietzsche envisioned such a land metaphorically through the experiential dimension of music and the Dionysian in general, Hesse and Eliade pictured a visionary landscape in which the true philosophers dwell. Hesse's *Kastilien* and Eliade's *Sambo* are concrete places of refuge for the tormented modern intellectual.

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## Review Essay

### The History of Religions in Europe

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*Europäische Religionsgeschichte. Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus.* Herausgegeben von HANS G. KIPPENBERG, JÖRG RÜPKE, KOCKU VON STUCKRAD. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009. II volumes, 854 pp. ISBN 978-3-8252-3206-1 (pbk.), €59.00.

One does not need to be an oracle to predict that these two volumes about the religious history of Europe will soon be followed by a number of articles and books on the same theme.<sup>1</sup> *Europäische Religionsgeschichte* (ER) is the first grand attempt to write about the role of religion in European cultural history. This also means that the genre has not yet been developed into a fixed pattern with a common consensus about what it should be like. In several ways this is a pioneering work, trying, on the one hand, to establish what Europe is from the perspective of religious studies and, on the other hand, deciding what themes should be included in the study. In religious studies, which is an academic interdisciplinary and secular study of religion with a global outlook and a comparative approach, Europe has up till now been rather a blind spot. Its exploration has in the main been left to Christian church history.

With the publication of ER the history of religions in Europe is virtually snatched from church history and theology and re-established in accordance with a comparative paradigm. The model that is used is

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<sup>1</sup> The first issue of the *Journal of Religion in Europe* was published in 2008 with Hans G. Kippenberg and Kocku von Stuckrad as editors.

called “integrative” (1). The project presupposes a critical reflection on the concept of religion and implies that religion is not seen as an essence, but as cultural pluralism and processes where different religious traditions interact. To the question about how European religion should be understood and what models one should use to study it, is added the question how Europe is best conceived of. Should Europe be seen as a geographical space or a discursive space or as something else? In the introduction to the first section of ER it is said that a geographical concept of Europe does not constitute a historical or ideological concept (1). This type of cultural concept is first developed when people understand, perhaps only rudimentary, that they belong to a broader European culture. At the same time as a European Christian identity was developed, Jerusalem and Athens were cultural points of orientation that made European identity somewhat eccentric (Brague 2002).

The two volumes are built on a research project that has engaged many scholars and been discussed at several seminars and workshops during the last years. The scholars come with few exceptions from German universities.<sup>2</sup>

### **Europäische Religionsgeschichte**

The volumes have four sections, each with a small introduction, and include twenty-eight articles. The introductions are well informed and with a surplus of interesting ideas, though all ideas are not necessarily followed up by the articles in each section. It would have been helpful if the volumes, in addition, had included a *post scriptum* that made an overview of what had been achieved in ER. The index at the end of the second volume, which contains approximately 12 pages, does not do full justice to the richness of the two volumes.

Section I is about writing a European history of religions and includes five articles (*Teil I: Das Problem einer Europäischen Religionsgeschichte*). The authors discuss what Europe is; what a history of religion in Europe should include; whether Europe is a special case; the concepts of secu-

<sup>2)</sup> A similar initiative exists as the Research Network on European History of Religions (NEUR) directed by Olav Hammer and Tim Jensen, both at the University of Southern Denmark.



larization and modernity. Section II takes up pluralism and its paths of development (*Teil II: Entwicklungspfade des Pluralismus*). The eight articles in this section cover several themes: Religion and law; religious ways of thinking, practices and social forms in the Middle Ages; religious differences in the Middle Ages; heresy and hunts for heretics; witch hunts; the confessions of Europe; religion and colonialism; migration and religious processes; religious plurality and conflict. Section III is about religions and society — especially the interchange between cultural systems (*Teil III: Religion und Gesellschaft: Transfers zwischen kulturellen Systemen*). It includes seven articles which treat the relationship between religion and science; religion and constitutions in secular states; the history of the concept of the soul; nation and religion; secular cult and political religions; philosophical discourses; the historical study of sacred scriptures. Section IV concentrates on religious communication and mediation (*Teil IV: Religiöse Kommunikation: Repräsentations- und Vermittlungsformen*). The seven articles in this section focus on the production of religion in space and time; ancient places in European religious history; forms of transmission of paganism in the Renaissance; the history of religious concepts in Germany; personal piety; religion in images; religion in fiction and literature.

The editors and many of the authors have made certain moves to keep the totality together, i.e. to keep the focus on the region of Europe. Authors who practice “the comparative gaze” draw long historical lines within Europe, especially to the Roman Empire; compare inner-European practices (could have been done in more cases); and apply a global comparative perspective in which the region of Europe is compared to other regions in the world. Small snippets of comparative information may be revealing, for instance the comparison between the Inquisition and the English queen, Mary I, where more people were killed during Mary’s reign than during the Inquisition. ER is at its most successful when its authors grasp the opportunity to use the comparative gaze, both as an inner-European practice and in a broader global perspective. Gustavo Benavides, for instance, compares the heresies of Europe with the religious scenarios of India and China to illuminate the fact that for more than thousand years nothing that did not call itself Christianity was allowed to exist in Europe (“Die Moderne im Zwiespalt der Religionen”, 87–123). This, however, does not mean that the pluralism of

the Middle Ages is overlooked; in Section II the theme is discussed in several articles, including the construction of heresy (Daniela Müller, “Häresie und Orthodoxie im mittelalterlichen Languedoc und die Entstehung des Ketzerprozesses”, 219–251).

Some authors reflect more explicitly on long historical lines and general religious processes and discourses. Their articles are mainly found in the successful first section of ER, “Das Problem einer Europäischen Religionsgeschichte”, but not only. Christoph Auffarth’s article on “Mittelalterliche Modelle der Eingrenzung und Ausgrenzung religiöser Verschiedenheit” (193–218) in Section II is a brilliant example of the use of “the comparative gaze”. Auffarth says that European religious history always implies a gaze at Europe in the knowledge that there are non-European and internal-European alternatives (194). The special merit of this article is further that it shows, by means of several examples, how Western Christianity has developed in interaction and contrast to Judaism and Islam.

ER is not comprehensive in the sense that it covers everything that one wants to know about the role of religion in European cultural history. Comprehensiveness would, of course, have been impossible to achieve. All the same, there are some questions that are not addressed or addressed insufficiently, and which should be addressed in future explorations of European religious history, for instance: What happened before Christianity? What happened in the fringe areas of Europe? What happened/happens to indigenous people, travellers and popular religion?

### **Writing a European History of Religions — What Happened before Christianity?**

*Geschichte* means “History” and refers to a study of the past, and in extension to the past, also to a study of the present. In a similar manner as a history of Europe is expected to be a description of the passage of time from when humans first settled in Europe to the present day, I would expect a European history of religions to describe religions in the same span of time. This description would obviously be much thinner for the long span before the development of writing, but I would expect it to be there. Did there, for instance, exist a bronze-age religious *koine*

in the Northern part of Europe? I would definitely expect a history of Europe's religious history to describe both the religious picture of Europe before the rise of Christianity and the process of Christianisation that took place over a span of more than thousand years in the diverse parts of Europe. On these two points the two volumes are not so helpful.

An objection to incorporate pre-Christian religions is that the editors of ER have not seen it as their task to write a complete history of Europe. They have defined their task to analyse the role of religion in the cultural history of Europe starting from a point of time when Europe was more or less conceived of as a region by its inhabitants. These seem, however, to be unnecessary chronological limitations.

### **Pluralism and its Paths of Development — What Happened in the Fringe Areas?**

Jörg Rüpke argues in his excellent article “Europa und die Europäische Religionsgeschichte” (3–14) for the use of a geographical concept of Europe as basis for a “europäischer Religionsgeschichte” (10–11). Rüpke is interested in the *longue durée* of European religious history and especially in its roots in the *Imperium Romanum*. This dimension of the European history of religions, its roots in the Roman Empire, is discussed in several articles. In addition to Rüpke, the historical connection to antiquity is also commented upon by Hans G. Kippenberg, who reaches back to antiquity in his treatment of law and religion (“Religion als Gemeinschaftsgut: Religiöse Zusammenkünfte und Rituale als rechtliche Tatbestände”, 127–154), by Jan N. Bremmer who investigates the career of the concept of the soul over three thousand years (“Die Karriere der Seele: Vom antiken Griechenland ins moderne Europa”, 497–524.) and by several others. The historical connection to the southern part of Europe is thus taken very well care of in ER and is one of the most valuable achievements of the work.

There are several claimants to the geographical midpoint of Europe depending on the definition of its borders and on which islands that should be included: Frauenkirch in Austria, Purnudkės north of Vilnius in Lithuania, Tallya in Hungary, Saaremaa in Estonia and Vitebsk in Belarus are among them. The geographical midpoint is, of course,

not identical with Europe's demographical centre of gravity, which probably is in southern Germany. For a European history of religions it is arguably more interesting to write about the religious development in the places where most people live, just like the authors of *Europäische Religionsgeschichte* have mostly done.

Still one could ask if there is too much stress on Germany and France, in comparison to other countries. To make ER a more extensive religious history of Europe, more countries and regions should have been involved. To illustrate this point: Germany has 13 references in the index, France has 14, England has 6, Italy 0, Scandinavia and the Scandinavian countries 0.

Things also happen in the fringe areas where discourses meet and cultural and religious transmutations and translations take place, not least in processes of conversion and shift of religions. There should have been more focus on adaption and opposition to the broad religious tenets that were incorporated in European culture, not least at its margins. What takes place at the margins may also help to define or illuminate what happens in other places — not least will it reveal the tension between unity and diversity.<sup>3</sup>

Parts of Europe were never annexed to the Roman Empire, and were to a small degree part of its sphere of influence. The conversion to Christianity happened late in many countries. How were the Christianization processes in the different countries? When did they take place? Bilateral research as well as research on the interplay between centre and periphery will be very fruitful. Scandinavia is mentioned a few times in the two volumes. What was the early Christian discourse in the northern periphery?<sup>4</sup> What were the regional patterns as well as the local specificities in the Christianization process? A comparative examination could most fruitfully see Scandinavia in relation to British and

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<sup>3</sup>) One example of the use of the fringe areas to describe transformations is when Franks and Romans virtually became Palestinians and Galileans in the Holy land, according to Auffarth who quotes Fulcher von Chartres on this point (195).

<sup>4</sup>) The construction of Christian Identity in the Northern Periphery (c. 820–c. 1200) is a research project at the Centre of Medieval Studies at the University of Bergen. The general aim of this project is to achieve a better understanding of the Christianization process in Northern Europe (c. 820–c. 1200), especially in Scandinavia and northern Russia, by bringing together the expertise of international specialists in related fields.

Continental, and, not least, East European conditions. Was the change in religion abrupt, or did it occur at different times in various areas? What was the motivation force? In the loft of one of the Norwegian stave churches from the beginning of the thirteenth century (Hegge church) there is an image of what seems to be the hanged god Odin. This is a local example, but I think it illustrates a global point. Not that there is too much stress on the impulses from the south in ER, but there is too little stress on themes that were confronted, transformed and incorporated in different ways in the northern and eastern parts of Europe. The interaction between local religious culture in the north and east and religious traditions from the south could have got more space in ER.

### **Religion and Society: What Happened to Indigenous People, Travellers and Popular Religion?**

Interactions between Christians and Muslims in Western secular societies are treated in several articles and touched upon in several others, generally with fresh insights and frequently by means of a comparative perspective. There are, however, religious groups and currents that are not sufficiently dealt with, for instance indigenous people. The term “indigenous” can be used to describe any ethnic group who inhabits a geographic region with which they have the earliest known historical connection, alongside more recent immigrants who have populated the region. However, indigenous people and religions have not got much space in ER. They are only mentioned in the passing, for instance in Burkhard Gladigow’s article where he names the expelled religions of the Celts, Germans, Slavs, Balts, Finns and Hungarians, but only in relation to the philological and historical exploration of them in modern times (“Europäische Religionsgeschichte der Neuzeit”, 15–37). A similar point is also made in Volkhard Krech’s article (“Die Historisierung heiliger Schriften”, 613–641).

Some people are recognized as indigenous people in a more narrow sense (recognized by international organs as the United Nations), for instance the Sámi people. The Sámi people are the indigenous people of northern Europe inhabiting the cultural region Sápmi, which today encompasses parts of northern Sweden, Norway, Finland and the Kola

Peninsula of Russia, but also live in the border area between south and middle Sweden.<sup>5</sup> That nothing is said about the Sámi people in ER is an unfortunate omission. Their inclusion would have contributed to make the general picture of religious Europe more complete.

The Sámi were nomads. In general, travelling could have been more actively used as a focusing lens in ER (Tweed 2006). Crusaders are mentioned, but a more explicit treatment of migration in a historical perspective, is mostly missing. As for contemporary migration, Astrid Reuter discusses how processes of migration initiate religio-cultural processes of change in the host countries (“Religionen im Prozess von Migration: Eine Fallstudie: Muslimische Migration nach Deutschland und Frankreich im 20. Jahrhundert”, 371–410). Other migrating populations and their religious belonging could also have been discussed, for instance Gypsy, Roma and traveller communities in Europe in relation to Pentecostal movements (Thurfjell 2009).

Secularization is discussed in several chapters and the differences between countries are presented, but there is little about New Age and Western Esotericism and little about religion and popular culture. Helmut Lehman predicts a growth in new religious groups, as Christian free churches, and a greater religious diversity in the future, not a regeneration of the established churches (“Ein europäischer Sonderweg in Sachen Religion”, 39–59). This is a persuasive point of view that could have been followed up in articles on contemporary religious diversity. One would expect that what has been called a new “re-enchantment” (for instance Gilhus and Mikaelsson 1998; Patridge 2005), referring to alternative spiritualities, and the interaction between alternative spiritualities and popular culture had deserved more space. These topics could have been included in Section III that contains articles about the transfer between different cultural systems. One example of an excellent article from this section is the one by Kocku von Stuckrad about science and religion where one point is to examine not the division between science and religion, but *how* this division is constructed (“Naturwissenschaft und Religion: Interferenzen und diskursive Transfers”, 441–467).

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<sup>5</sup> The Sámi are among the largest indigenous ethnic groups in Europe with ten distinct Sámi languages, classified as members of the Uralic language family.

Gender is treated in one chapter (written by one of the three women that have been included among the twenty-eight contributors to ER). Taken in consideration that sex and gender are important themes in most religions, that the largest religion of Europe, Christianity, in its different versions has treated sex and gender in characteristic and peculiar ways one could have expected that more people had wanted to say something about it.

The articles in the fourth section of ER seem to be more specialized as well as more heterogeneous than those in the other sections. They include several fruitful perspectives and theoretical approaches, for instance Jürg Rüpke's article about staging and producing religion in time and space ("Inszenierung von Religionen in Raum und Zeit", 645–665). Hubert Cancik writes about the reception of ancient culture in different phases and places ("Orte der Antike in einer europäischen Religionsgeschichte", 667–693), while Michael Stausberg treats the use of Paganism in the Renaissance in a theoretically fascinating article, applying a discourse perspective ("Renaissancen: Vermittlungsformen des Paganen", 695–721). According to Stausberg, "Europäische Religionsgeschichte ist dann nicht die Geschichte von Religionen in Europa — seien sie christlich oder nicht, in monopolistischer oder pluralistischer Verfassung —, sondern die Geschichte von Diskursen, die in verschiedenen Mediatisierungen, Kontexten und Modi mit Themen operieren, die wir aus unterschiedlichen Gründen und Interessen *sub specie religionis* zu fassen geneigt sein können, z. B. weil sie mit Namen (wie z. B. Zoroaster/Zarathustra) oder Bildern operieren, die ansonsten in bestimmten Religionen beheimatet sind" (714). The discourse perspective is one of the dominant and most fruitful perspectives in ER (von Stuckrad 2003).

Stausberg touches briefly modern paganism (for instance Wicca). The use of religious motifs from other parts of Europe than the Mediterranean could have been discussed more extensively in one or more additional articles.

## Conclusion

*Europäische Religionsgeschichte* is definitely not a church history. The editors and authors have to a great extent managed to use the comparative

gaze to good effect, and the two volumes are integrative and include religious pluralism. Thus the main ambitions behind this pioneering project are fulfilled.

A lingering question is if the focus on a model of Europe as a region is too much of a straitjacket? Perhaps the perspective of Europe as a unity to a higher degree could have interacted with a model of Europe as regions? By trying to keep Europe as a unity, one may have, like the sisters of Cinderella, been forced to cut off some toes — in this case “toes” means the northern and eastern parts of Europe.

The translation process where pagan motives from Classical cultures are recycled in Christian cultures has got due attention, but the recycling of motives from other parts of Europe than those from the south and from antiquity could have been commented more upon. If Europe had been seen less as a unity and more like regions, perhaps the lack of stress on some part of Europe at the cost of others would have been more visible to the editors? The “bilingual” aspect of culture, religion and language as well as different constructions of the past in different countries and regions should have been focused more upon.

The restless elements (travellers) that would have made the broad picture more disturbed and at the same time more complete could have been included to a higher degree. Contemporary religious currents of the New Age/new spirituality variety could more comprehensively have been included as well, not least the interaction between these currents and popular culture.

In spite of these critical points, mostly pertaining to what is not included, the overall impression is that this is an important and successful work. The high number of contributors combined with the high quality of the articles in ER is very impressive.

The importance of Burkhard Gladigow’s lecture in Bremen in 1993 for the project of a European history of religions is stressed several times in ER. The two volumes of *Europäische Religionsgeschichte* really show that this initiative was both important and fruitful.

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## Book Reviews

*Casting Faiths: Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia*. Edited by THOMAS DAVID DUBOIS. Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. xi + 271 pp. ISBN: 0230221580, £ 55.00.

The focus of this impressive edited collection is the interaction between imperialism — variously conceived — and a range of social contexts in East and Southeast Asia featuring what has come to be called ‘religion’. The chapters include revised contributions from a conference entitled ‘Casting Faiths: Construction of Religion in East and Southeast Asia’ held at the National University of Singapore in 2005. The notions of ‘imperialism’ adduced in the book range from Dutch, British and Japanese colonialism to the activities of Western (American, German) Christian missions and modern Han Chinese hegemony in ethnic minority areas. Dubois, in his substantial editor’s introduction, identifies a triad of influences which ‘combined to transform the definition, practice and social significance of religion in East and Southeast Asia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’. These he identifies as society, theology and the structural context (or technology). The book thereafter is divided into four parts: I. ‘Orientalism and the Western Recasting of Buddhism’, II. ‘Mission and Meaning in Christianity’, III. ‘State and Religious Ethnicity’ and IV. ‘New Media and New Religion’, plus an ‘Afterword’.

In Part I, Alexey Kirichenko explores the construction of concepts of ‘Buddhism’ and ‘religion’ in 19th–20th century Burma/Myanmar and Judith Snodgrass assesses D. T. Suzuki’s ‘journey to the West’ as entrepreneurial disciple — and sometime mentor — of the mercurial Paul Carus, following the disappointing reception of East Asian Mahayana at the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions. In Part II, Roberta Wollons assesses the changing trajectory of American Christian evangelism in modernising Japan, through the example of Annie Lyon Howe, one of a new breed of women missionary educators. Howe arrived in Japan in 1887, retiring to the USA in 1926 at the age of 74. Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz charts evolving colonial and missionary attitudes to indigenous worship practices and material culture (e.g. ‘idols’) on the Indonesian island of Nias, and Peter Hansen examines the unusually comprehensive form of priestly authority which migrated to Southern Vietnam with oppressed

Catholic communities from the North, after the 1954 partition. In Part III, Iza Hussein looks at the late 19th century making of the increasingly significant idea of 'Islamic Law' in British Malaya (now Malaysia) and Jennifer Connolly shows how a modern 'Dayak community' emerged out of disparate local groups influenced by Christian missions, Dutch colonial policy and the post-colonial Indonesian state. Donald S. Sutton and Xiaofei Kang present a case study of a contemporary multiethnic (Tibetan, Han, Muslim) centre of pilgrimage now designated a Chinese UNESCO World Heritage site. In Part IV, Thomas DuBois offers an analysis of the approaches to religion reflected in successive decades of publication of a Japanese-owned Chinese-language newspaper in what became Manchukuo, while Nancy Stalker examines the skilful exploitation by the Japanese 'new religion' Ōmoto of new media (primarily exhibitions and films) in the 1920s and '30s. These ten topical chapters are sandwiched between DuBois' Introduction and the Afterword 'Questioning faiths? Casting doubts' by Oscar Salemink which critiques DuBois' approach in the Introduction, in an appropriately postcolonial attempt to 'other' the main editorial voice.

DuBois' 'Introduction' emphasises multidirectional and reciprocal influences at work in the encounter between imperial or hegemonic powers and native or indigenous concepts and practices. He makes two main points (15). First, that changes might have been initiated by the powerful, but were never completely directed by them; the techniques they introduced constituted the lasting and pervasive influence. 'New ways of communicating knowledge, seeking religious converts, ruling diverse populations and engaging in trade were beyond the ability of any one party to monopolize, and the ideas that these new practices implied transformed the entire region, friends and foes alike'. Secondly, 'all of these transformations were deeply interconnected, and change to any one area could have diverse and often unexpected repercussions for others, including the idea and practice of religion'. Unintended consequences are for DuBois the legacy of these 19th–20th century encounters. In his afterword Salemink questions DuBois' thesis, pointing to the preponderance in this book of examples of faiths which are 'heterodox' and thus at odds with hegemonic state powers. Salemink argues that a contest between religious authority and state authority (as in Europe) sharpens the distinction between political and religious, generates the category of the secular, and hence constructs the modern area dubbed 'religion' (262).

This is a book full of intriguing ideas and interconnections. It should prove interesting to scholars across the broad field of the study of religions and it should find a place in any good library on religions. Very few readers will be

familiar with all of the areas and periods studied, and the enterprise of bringing together specialists across East and Southeast Asia to examine a process hitherto largely explored in other contexts undoubtedly proves fruitful. The individual chapters, though often loosely related in time and place, focus attention on the commonalities as well as the disparities between, say, the rise of Burmese Buddhist nationalism, 20th century missionary activities in the Indonesian islands and the transformation of a mainly Tibetan pilgrimage site into a Chinese tourist attraction. Perhaps the most important contribution of the book is its insistence that comparisons between countries of East and Southeast Asia are as important, if not more so, than well-worn comparisons between individual Asian regions and 'the West'. Readers will draw stimulus from the different chapters according to their particular interests. Newly teaching the study of religions at an Irish university, I was drawn by the reference (34) to 'Mr Colvin, an Irish ordained into *samgha* as U. Dhammaloka, who was important in the multireligious temperance movements as well as founding Buddhist associations in Japan'. This was in 1900. The 'Westernized' nature of an early Burmese Buddhist association in Mandalay is attributed in part to Colvin's influence, though the incongruous position of Ireland at the time, as a 'Western' colonial possession with a nationalist cause and movement of its own, might also have been noted.

Incidentally, the phrase 'an Irish ordained into *samgha*' cries out for proof-reading, as does the remainder of that chapter and, to a lesser extent, the rest of the volume, which has too many minor mistakes of grammar, spelling and word-order to enumerate here. Some could have been picked up with a spell-checker but hardly any would require a specialist reader to correct them — this is surely Palgrave Macmillan's job? Two infelicities deserve special mention for their high ironic content. Annie Howe, lifelong teacher and linguist, would undoubtedly be pained to hear that her fellow women missionaries' 'keen sense of responsibility toward those they considered less fortunate cannot be underestimated' (82) while Kuroda Toshio's appearance as the author of *Outlines of the Mahayana* for the World's Parliament of Religions (53) must surely be a 'ghost-image' of *Shintō* (correctly identified in the footnote, 69)!

Some chapters make passing reference to other contributions in the book, but there is plenty for the reader to do in the way of making connections and identifying questions which might be addressed by bringing the case-studies into closer dialogue. One of my questions concerns Roberta Wollons' identification of a crucial and gendered shift in 19th century American missionary ideology, in which Rufus Anderson's early aim of creating indigenous, autonomous Christian churches gave way to the hierarchical ideal of Western-style Christian-based education envisioned by the new wave of educated women

missionaries. By contrast, Jennifer Connolly says of the non-denominational CMA's approach to mission in Kalimantan (Malaya) that it sought to build 'an indigenous, national church, independent from the American mother church'. Is this a turning back to Rufus Anderson's earlier vision, a revised approach which took lessons from the Japanese example, or is the apparently successful approach in Malaya simply unrelated to what happened in Japan?

Finally, one has to ask what the phrase 'casting religion' is meant to convey, since it has no literal meaning. The most obvious (to me) metaphorical sense, of casting something fluid into a mould where it sets, hardly fits DuBois' thesis of 'unintended consequences' and it is notable that he makes no reference to the phrase in his Introduction. Other authors refer sporadically to 'casting', either using the term as though its meaning were obvious (e.g. 23), or making a play on the title ('cast in shadow', 191; 'casting doubts', 262). I found the unexplained use of the term puzzling and I would have liked to know why both conference and ensuing book were thus named. Perhaps the title is a Derridean gesture and we are not meant to know?

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*Myths and Mythologies. A Reader.* Edited by JEPPE SINDING JENSEN. London / Oakville: Equinox, 2009. ISBN-13 9781904768081 (hbk.), \$110; ISBN-13 9781904768098 (pbk.), \$27.95.

The book is published in a series on “Critical Categories in the Study of Religion”. Among already available volumes, *Syncretism in Religion* (also published by Jensen and *alii*), *Ritual and Religious Belief*, *Defining Hinduism*, *Religion and Cognition*, *Mircea Eliade*, *Defining Buddhisms*, and *Defining Islam*. The series aims at two main goals: presenting the “classical issues that surround the use of various key terms” and giving “an opportunity for a thorough retooling of the concept under study.” We shall try to assess in which measure the book under review achieves those objectives. Since the volume reads as a collection of selected contributions on myth, the reviewer’s work essentially engages the editor’s introduction and conclusion, as well as the editorial choice of the articles themselves.

Especially useful in the general introduction, is the historiographical guideline (“The History of the Study of Myth and Mythology”, 17–27) which traces back the history of myth from Antiquity, through the medieval era, to the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Romantics, Comparative Mythology, the “Religionsgeschichtliche Schule” and the “Myth and Ritual” school. The introduction also provides arguments for building a critical and constructive notion of “myth”. Thus Jensen defines “myth” in the following terms (10): “myths are traditional, authoritative narratives referring to transcendent referents, and which fuse the lived-in world with the thought-of world in such a manner that this seems the only plausible version.” In sound methodology, such a “working” definition is necessary, since many contributors (Popper, Searle, Durkheim and Mauss, Bruner, Clark) do not explicitly deal with “myths”. The definition thus helps to see why those texts are indeed “good to read” (5) for a better understanding of the topic “myth”.

At the same time, such a definition implies a *de facto* personal theory on myths. Quite explicitly, Jensen writes: “Myths are the building blocks of culture if by culture we mean something like ‘common orientations,’ ‘common ideas and values’ in a given human population.” (13). This point of view can also be found in the conclusion of the volume, which interestingly extends the category of myth to show its heuristic interest in completely secular contexts (notably, advertisements, 431). The volume is thus as much about explaining specific views on myth as defending its own theory on myths. In the wording of the series’ description, this contributes to a “retooling of the concept”, going beyond a mere deconstruction of the category.

The choice of contributions, to me, seems particularly interesting for one main reason. It deliberately strays off from the beaten track of classical authors on myth. Dealing with thinkers such as K. Popper, P. Clastres, R. Wagner or E. Hutchins, it opens new perspectives to readers already acquainted with the classical stories on myth. As a standalone introduction, however, certain chapters in the history of “myth” would not be sufficiently developed (e.g. the figure of Tylor, which already studied in all conceivable ways as he may be, raises important issues on science vs. pseudo-science, civilized vs. savage, quite crucial for the historiography of myth).

Similarly, more critical texts on myths could have been included. In the history of the study of religion, “myth” was indeed not always considered positively (especially in sociological or anthropological approaches), and rituals were at times privileged over myths for various (political, religious etc.) reasons. Thus, even if the reviewer is well aware that the volume is on myth and not ritual, a more thorough discussion of the intricate relation between those two categories would have been useful (mention is however made of the “myth ritual school” (26)). It is equally surprising to find no entry under “rite” or “ritual” in the general index, but, given that the series “Critical Categories in the Study of Religion” focuses on one category at a time, this may be difficult to avoid.

For the entire volume, the red thread Jensen chooses to follow is historical (5). Concurrently, he focuses on different “approaches”, viz. Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, Semiology and Cognitive Science. If the first four approaches are quite self-evident in a survey of different studies of myth, the last one is a little bit more “out of the canon”. The author contends for the necessity of this section — in my opinion convincingly — arguing that cognitive science is developing quickly, in ways not exactly covered so far by other approaches. It is certainly a good idea to distinguish those approaches in order to sort out the intricate and complicated story of myth and its study; however, proceeding by “approaches” makes it more difficult to track the historical thread Jensen claims to follow: thus M. Müller comes after K. Popper and E. Durkheim after M. Eliade. This is nevertheless counterbalanced by an appropriate historical contextualization by the editor in the introduction of each approach, and by dealing with the authors of a given approach in an approximately chronological way.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>) A more systematic indication of the original publishing date of the sources would however have been useful in the presentation of the sources (pp. xi–xiii). Thus, the text of Freud (1916–1917) was published before the text of Malinowski (1925) and the text of Barthes (1966) before the text of Detienne (1974).

As always, perhaps, one can wonder why certain contributions appear under one section rather than another. Thus, for example, Searle's text on language and social reality would perfectly fit into the semiological approaches, and it is not sure that Malinowski's contribution is best located in the section on psychological approaches, since as Jensen recognizes (131), it does not only relate myth to psychological factors but rather emphasizes its cultural function. Of course, it can also be asked whether other sections would not have been useful as well. For example, a section on anthropological approaches (in which Lévy-Bruhl and Malinowski would have been at ease) could have interestingly tackled issues about the translatability of a textual genre such as "myth": is "myth" a genuinely European invention, mostly seen *by* Europeans in and outside of Europe? Or is some idea of "myth" also present in other traditions as well, described in vernacular terms designating different classes of "stories"? Even if the cognitive approaches might seem to bring answers to those questions, they do not go away as easily and can constitute a healthy caveat against a too hasty universalization of a "mythical function".

Apart from these relatively minor reservations, the book indeed presents issues related to the history of the category of "myth" and helps to constructively think about it. Because of the editorial choice of the contributions, however, I see this volume largely as a useful complement to an existing introduction.<sup>2</sup> Whether, to use an expression of B. Lincoln,<sup>3</sup> the book itself can be seen as a "myth with footnotes" that its author does not say.

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<sup>2</sup> Among others, Segal, Robert A., *Myth. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Lincoln, Bruce, "Epilogue. Scholarship as Myth" in *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999, p. 209.



*Animal Sacrifice in Ancient Greek Religion, Judaism and Christianity, 100 BC to AD 200.* By MARIA-ZOÉ PETROPOULOU. (Oxford Classical Monographs.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-19-921854-7 (hbk.), 63.

Le présent ouvrage est la réélaboration d'une thèse de doctorat préparée à Oxford sous la direction du professeur Fergus Millar. Il propose une approche comparatiste « du sacrifice sanglant vu du point de vue des Grecs, des Juifs et des Chrétiens » (VI). La période étudiée 100 av J.-C.–200 après J.-C. autorise l'auteur à analyser les transformations qui s'opèrent d'une époque où les sacrifices sont encore pratiqués au temple de Jérusalem à une époque où le christianisme est déjà bien implanté en Méditerranée orientale « as a religion without altars for slaughter » (V). Seules les sources textuelles et, pour le monde gréco-romain, épigraphiques, sont prises en compte (VIII). La religion publique romaine, le culte impérial et « l'abstinence des viandes » sont délibérément laissés de côté compte tenu de la spécificité des questions en jeu (VIII).

Quatre grandes parties, « Approaching the issues of sacrifice » (chap. 1, qui explicite les choix méthodologiques et théoriques du livre après un rapide survol des principales théories anthropologiques et approches historiques du sacrifice au XXe s.), « Greek Animal Sacrifice 100 BC–AD 200 » (chap. 2), « Jewish Animal Sacrifice 100 BC–AD 200 » (chap. 4), « Christians and Animal Sacrifice in the Period up to AD 200 » (chap. 6), sont encadrées par des chapitres de transition qui développent la dimension comparatiste voulue par l'auteur et portent le titre évocateur de « ponts »: « From Greek Religion to Judaism: A Bridge » (chap. 3) et « A bridge linking Greek Religion and Judaism to Christianity » (chap. 5). La conclusion (chap. 7) esquisse une réponse à la question qui oriente toute la démarche de l'auteur: quelles *raisons* et quelles *circonstances* ont pu conduire à *la fin du sacrifice sanglant*, pratique dont le livre s'est justement efforcé de démontrer qu'il conservait une place absolument centrale *tant* dans la religion grecque que dans le judaïsme au moment de l'apparition du christianisme (28).

M.-Z. Petropoulou propose une approche soucieuse d'articuler une dimension « verticale » du sacrifice, « the relation between the offerer of sacrifice and its recipient, a relation which is expressed in the beliefs of the worshippers, by means of a theological or metaphysical language » avec sa dimension « horizontale », « the relation of the offerer with the reality in which he/she belongs », dimension pour laquelle l'auteur propose un schème d'analyse qui se veut susceptible d'intégrer les aspects les plus fortement « codifiés » de la procédure sacrificielle, mais dont la principale fonction est d'ordre méthodologique. Il autorise une comparaison commode entre les pratiques de cultures différentes en dessinant « a horizontal line of sacrificial procedure » qui prend en compte

«l'espace et les instruments du sacrifice, les offrandes, les activités, les valeurs et les styles de vie» (26–31). C'est toutefois au chapitre 6 qui aborde les transformations qu'opère la constitution d'une pensée proprement chrétienne du sacrifice, que le lecteur peut vraiment prendre la mesure de l'intérêt de la méthode.

Tout en avouant sa préférence pour les approches structuralistes du sacrifice, M.-Z. Petropoulou reconnaît avoir eu surtout recours à une «herméneutique traditionnelle» «which consists in the close reading of texts», méthode qu'elle décrit comme «la mieux adaptée au traitement de la question essentiellement historique» qui constitue le vrai fil directeur de l'ouvrage: la *rupture radicale* que marque la fin du sacrifice. L'étude de la dimension horizontale du sacrifice est nettement privilégiée dans la mesure où l'historien peut plus aisément y repérer, à partir de faits positifs, les changements qui affectent un système religieux *dans son ensemble*. «By accepting the interdependence of the two lines, we shall be able to recognize that an obvious change in the horizontal line signifies that a fundamental change in the whole system has taken place» (31). On pourrait certes regretter que les modalités de cette interdépendance ne soient pas davantage explicitées, mais il faut sans doute y voir une preuve de prudence méthodologique. L'auteur cherche moins à produire une nouvelle théorie «explicative» que des instruments de comparaison efficaces.

Réfutant la thèse d'un déclin du sacrifice et soulignant certains de ses pré-supposés implicites, «un mouvement vers le monothéisme» (L. Robert, *OMS* V, 610), la partie grecque montre, documents à l'appui, «the vitality and variety in sacrificial practice» durant les deux premiers siècles de l'Empire. Elle souligne l'aspect alimentaire et civique des sacrifices et des fêtes, la dimension «spectaculaire» des plus somptueux qui sont autant d'occasions d'évergésie pour les élites locales. La récusation des lectures évolutionnistes (avec Stengel et Nilsson comme modèles) postulant un déclin de la pratique «traditionnelle» à l'époque hellénistique et romaine, et l'attention constante à la vitalité du sacrifice sous le haut Empire comptent parmi les principaux mérites d'un ouvrage qui constituera une utile contribution à la réévaluation des pratiques polythéistes dans l'Orient hellénisé des deux premiers siècles. La pertinence de la perspective choisie fait d'autant plus regretter l'impression d'arbitraire que laissent les sélections opérées dans une documentation abondante (un défaut auquel il aurait été facile de remédier dans un livre qui fait par ailleurs une part presque excessive aux précautions méthodologiques et théoriques) et de graves lacunes dans la bibliographie (une part importante des travaux récents et significatifs sur Plutarque et Pausanias, sources majeures s'il en est, ne sont pas pris en compte — ceux par exemple, fondamentaux, de V. Pirenne Delforge sur les sacrifices dans la *Périégèse*). En fin de compte, ce sont les aspects sociologiques

de la pratique sacrificielle grecque qui sont le mieux mis en valeur, l'étude des procédures rituelles, de leur logique interne, des stratégies auxquelles elles donnent lieu, aurait exigé des outils *anthropologiques* plus pointus. Ce déficit anthropologique constitue un vrai manque dans un livre qui se propose de comparer des systèmes sacrificiels entre *polythéismes* gréco-romains et *monothéisme* judéen et d'interroger en profondeur leur disparition.

Cette comparaison entre pratique sacrificielle juive et grecque, si rapide soit-elle, n'en reste pas moins un des aspects les plus fascinants du livre et nous ne pouvons que souhaiter qu'elle inspire d'autres travaux. Soulignons l'intérêt du regard croisé entre textes de la *Mishna* et œuvre de Philon (chap. 4), ou de l'analyse, approfondie et attentive au contexte, des rapports entre observance de la loi et lecture allégorique chez ce dernier. « Although he was a Jew of the Diaspora and Temple sacrificial practice was not part of his life, Philo considered animal sacrificial ritual to be crucial to his religious consciousness ». Loin d'opposer pratique et allégorèse, Philon pose la stricte observance cultuelle de la loi comme la condition qui « permet d'acquérir une conception claire de ce dont elle est le symbole » (151). C'est *dans le code sacrificiel même* que gît la possibilité de trouver d'autres vérités. « It is important to suggest that a number of Diaspora Jews respected and believed in Jewish ritual without being at odds with an allegorical interpretation of it ». Maria-Zoé Petropoulou considère enfin avec beaucoup de prudence et de nuances les conséquences de la destruction du Temple, en soulignant toutes les valeurs attachées à la codification sacrificielle dans la tradition rabbinique. On regrettera toutefois que le travail comparatiste n'ait pas été poussé plus loin. Ainsi les pages sur le statut de l'allégorèse philosophique chez Philon appelaient une comparaison avec le « prêtre philosophe » Plutarque...

Pour aborder la partie chrétienne, l'auteur rappelle une évidence aisément oubliée : juifs ou païens, ceux qui se tournent vers le christianisme viennent d'une culture sacrificielle, et, au moins jusqu'en 70, l'attitude des « premiers chrétiens » semble pouvoir aller de la complète acception du rituel du Temple à un refus sans concession de tout sacrifice. L'opposition entre la période antérieure à 70, encore dominée par l'activité du Temple, et le II<sup>e</sup> s. marquée par d'intenses polémiques tant avec les juifs que les païens, est fortement soulignée. L'accent est mis sur le rôle du langage, sur l'adoption d'une imagerie sacrificielle qui désinvestit paradoxalement la pratique de sa raison d'être. C'est pourquoi, dans le passage au crible extrêmement minutieux du corpus néotestamentaire, l'analyse de la différence entre allégorie philonienne et métaphore paulinienne constitue un des moments forts du livre : « sacrificial metaphor annuls the materials and objects current in cult in Antiquity, but transmits their role to other areas of reality; (...) the reality of animal sacrifice

is put aside» (243–244). Le cheminement de cet «undermining power of metaphors» et des changements en profondeur de l'ensemble du système religieux qu'il atteste est poursuivi à travers l'étude des Apologistes. «At the same time as the Eucharist was being established as a Christian cultic act, its metaphorical analogy to sacrifice was in the process of being fixed» (280). Il n'en reste pas moins que, pour l'auteur, les textes chrétiens pris en eux-mêmes ne permettent pas de faire d'hypothèses «about the way in which Christians transformed themselves from offerers of animal sacrifice to ardent opponents of it» (281).

Tout en insistant sur l'importance de la cristallisation autour de la figure de Jésus, sur le changement radical de rapport à la Loi qu'elle implique, et sur les incompatibilités avec le code sacrificiel juif qui résultent de cette situation nouvelle et que résout un nouveau langage sacrificiel, la conclusion du livre reste très prudente quant au «pourquoi» de la fin des sacrifices. Il n'aura cependant peut-être pas été inutile de rappeler que «Christianity emerged unexpectedly from the well-functioning Jewish religious environment, and spread rapidly within the well-functioning Pagan religious environment» (291).

Malgré des limites et des insuffisances qui n'échapperont pas aux spécialistes des différents domaines traversés, le livre fort ambitieux de Maria-Zoé Petropoulou fait montre d'une ampleur de vue qui stimulera tous les lecteurs intéressés par la place du sacrifice dans les cultures de la méditerranée ancienne et par le changement radical qu'imposera la christianisation de l'Empire. Il éclaire les périodes immédiatement antérieures à celles qui ont retenu l'attention des travaux fondamentaux de G. Stroumsa (*La fin du sacrifice*, Paris 2005), et – c'est peut-être le plus important d'un point de vue méthodologique – il témoigne de la forte valeur heuristique des approches comparatistes et de l'intérêt qu'il y a à replacer les questions traitées, par delà les problématiques disciplinaires spécifiques, dans le creuset commun d'un monde méditerranéen désormais dominé par Rome.

Dominique Jaillard  
*Université de Lausanne*

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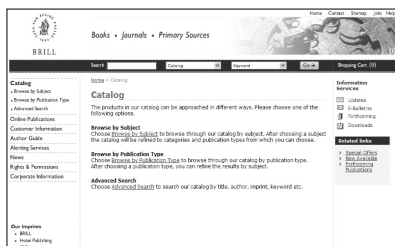
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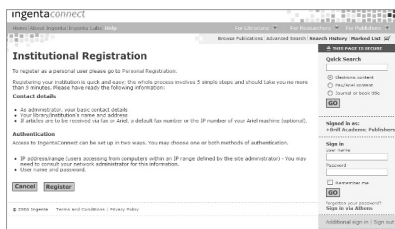
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## **Making Law for the Spirits: *Angakkuit*, Revelation and Rulemaking in the Canadian Arctic**

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### **Abstract**

Processes of revelation and rulemaking are examined in the context of the indigenous religion of the Inuit of arctic Canada. Instances of misfortune, conventionally understood to be the manner in which spirit intentions concerning human conduct are revealed, instigate social mechanisms through which normative rules are created and maintained. The performances of Inuit religious specialists, the *angakkuit*, play a key role in this process. The Inuit case invites comparative assessments of means of rule construction and the discernment of intentions in the context of both other religious traditions and secular normative systems.

### **Keywords**

Inuit, misfortune, revelation, rulemaking, shamanism

### **Introduction**

Rules regarding human conduct based on intentions ascribed to spiritual beings occur across virtually the entire range of religious communities and traditions. The manner in which these intentions are conventionally believed to be revealed, however, varies widely. So, too, do the social processes through which the rules derived from ascribed spirit intentions are publicly identified, defined, and communicated. The nature of the social processes that serve to create and sustain these rules, and the ways these processes reflect conventional

understandings concerning how such intentions are revealed, merit comparative investigation.

Nowhere, perhaps, are norms predicated on interactions with the spirit world more prominently displayed in the conduct of everyday affairs and in coping with the exigencies of survival than in early accounts of the indigenous, nonliterate, “shamanic” (Wallace 1966:84–91) religious tradition of the Inuit of arctic Canada. Here, a remarkably constraining set of injunctions surrounded the essential activities and tasks related to subsistence and Inuit material life, a set of rules so varied and constraining that one could hardly avoid offending them — however incidentally — in the normal course of life. How to account for the overwhelming number of these injunctions or “taboos,” and the fact that in some instances they appear clearly detrimental to survival, poses a long-standing puzzle in the analysis of Inuit religion. Ecological and symbolic functions and contributions to the status of Inuit religious specialists have previously been proposed as answers to this puzzle (Riches 1994:391–396). In this paper I explore how the nature of the social processes through which this body of Inuit norms was publicly created and sustained may also provide at least part of an answer.

Analyses of the social processes through which rules are generated, authoritatively defined, maintained, modified and abandoned, represents a long-standing and fruitful approach to the study of normative systems in the field of socio-legal research (e.g., Griffiths 2006; Moore 1978, 2005; Merry 1988; Pospisil 1971). My larger, and indeed primary, objective in applying this sort of analysis to Inuit processes of revelation and rulemaking is to suggest the value of extending it to relations with the spirit world in the context of non-literate, non-scriptural religious traditions.

The analysis that I will offer here is based on the observations of the principal early ethnographers who provide first-hand accounts of indigenous Inuit belief and practice, collectively covering a time span from the early 1880s to the early 1920s and ranging geographically across the expanse of Canadian territory from Baffin Island in the east to the Mackenzie Delta and north Alaska in the west (Boas 1964; Jenness 1923, 1991; Rasmussen 1929, 1930, 1931, 1932; Stefansson 1962, 2001). In the wake of Western contact, and the conversions to

mission Christianity and the emergence of new religious movements under indigenous prophets that came with it, religious life in the Canadian Arctic underwent significant change. But at the time of early ethnographers' visits, even after inroads from Christianity were beginning to occur through contacts with Westerners and missionary work, indigenous religious norms and practices remained prominent and could be readily observed and described.

In what follows, I begin by reviewing salient and familiar features of the Inuit religious world, focusing on the spirits that inhabit that world, their relations with humans, and the norms derived from those relations. I then analyze the social processes through which the remarkable body of Inuit rules constraining human conduct appear to have been created and maintained in response to interactions with the spirits, and explore some implications of the revelatory functions of misfortune and the responses misfortune elicited.

### Spirits and Rules in the Inuit World

In the course of a visit to the Iglulik Inuit in the vicinity of Lyon Inlet in 1922, the explorer and ethnologist Knud Rasmussen managed to elicit several evenings of discussions concerning “rules of life and taboo customs” during which, he observed, he failed to get “beyond a long and circumstantial statement of all that was permitted and all that was forbidden.” “Everyone knew precisely what had to be done in any given situation,” Rasmussen noted, “but whenever I put in my query: ‘Why,’ they could give no answer” (Rasmussen 1929:54). At length, however, Aua, an *angakkuq* (shaman)<sup>1</sup> and chief spokesman for the local group, responded to Rasmussen’s repeated queries of “why” with a telling answer. “Our fathers” Aua explained “have inherited from their fathers all the old rules of life which are based on the experience and wisdom of generations. We do not know, we cannot, but we keep

<sup>1)</sup> Alice Kehoe (2000:102) makes the point that “Good scholarship, good science, and ethics oblige anthropologists to maintain the terms ‘shaman’ and ‘shamanism’ primarily to practitioners so-called in their homelands. The terms may be used with notes of citation for apparently similar practitioners in the zone of northern steppes, forests and tundra in which Siberians historically linked with Sami, Inuit and American Indians.” In this paper, I employ the Inuit term *angakkuq* (pl.: *angakkuit*).

those rules in order that we may live untroubled. And so ignorant are we in spite of all our shamans, that we fear everything unfamiliar. We fear what we see about us, and we fear all the invisible things that are likewise about us, all that we have heard in our forefathers' stories and myths" (Rasmussen 1929:56).

What is apparent in Aua's explanation is the powerful authority of tradition. Norms in this case are authoritative — in the sense of content-independent, preemptory reasons for action (Shapiro 2002: 389) — simply by virtue of their being handed down. The justification for the authoritative power of tradition is also embedded in Aua's remarks. Failure to act on the basis of "the experience and wisdom" of past generations embodied in normative traditions could only court suffering at the hands of the myriad threats to human well being that are constantly at hand. These threats, furthermore, were regarded as ultimately spiritual in nature, and failures to observe the rules attributed to the spirit world carried not only personal consequences but consequences for the entire community. "From birth to death," Rasmussen observed, "human beings have to regulate their lives according to the powers that control human weal and woe, and whose anger can give rise to suffering and hardship, not only for the person who has offended, but for the whole village. Obligations towards the higher powers are thus not a private matter, but one affecting the entire community, and the individual must conform to the rules — numerous and irksome though they may be — which are held to be pleasing or conciliating to the divine powers" (Rasmussen 1929:169).

As described in the early ethnographic literature, the scope and variety of these obligations to the spiritual powers who controlled the fortunes of human beings was unquestionably impressive. Myriad rules governing behavior toward the game animals on which human life depended, for example, worked to constrain occasions for sewing caribou skin, sewing sealskin, and processing caribou products in relation to processing seal products (to prevent contamination between the two). There were rules to forestall contamination between products of the caribou and the whale hunt, between fish and animals generally, and between any products of the land and products of the sea. Added to this were multitudinous rules concerning relations with the dead, with human and animal souls, and concerning puberty, menstruation

and birth, violations of any of which could pose an imminent threat of fearful consequences (Weyer 1932:333–340, 365–380).

The early accounts are all in agreement that when misfortune struck, the source of it was commonly believed to lie in some human action that was offensive to some spiritual being who responded to the offense by causing affliction. The rules, accordingly, simply constituted a body of prohibitions and prescriptions that experience and tradition suggested were necessary means to forestall spiritual offense. The afflictions imposed by offended spirits could assume virtually any form, but most commonly manifested themselves as sickness or bad hunting (Jenness 1923:186; Rasmussen 1931:40; Weyer 1932:325–327, 377–379).

The spirits potentially responsible, and likewise the possibilities for offense, were legion. Spirits capable of inflicting harm included the souls of animals, the spirits of the dead, spirits of objects, spirits of places, and other spirits who functioned in disembodied form, but were also believed capable of assuming palpable appearances (Lau-grand et al. 2000, 2002; Peck 2006:397–468; Weyer 1932:394–401). In addition to these, a spirit widely known as “Sila” resided in the air and was typically manifest in the behavior of the elements related to the atmosphere. Natural phenomena such as wind or blizzards were regarded as manifestations of the spiritual intentions of Sila, subject to Sila’s deliberation and thus susceptible to persuasion just as were the intentions of humans (Weyer 1932:389). And from the Coronation Gulf eastward, across the broad expanse of the central and eastern Canadian arctic, a sea spirit known as “Sedna” on Baffin Island (and by a variety of other names elsewhere) acted to withhold game, and sometimes to control the weather affecting game, in response to the offensive acts of humans. As will be noted below, the sea spirit was not only widely regarded as the keeper of animal spirits beneath the sea, but was a key figure in the myth of their origin, and in many areas had to be annually propitiated to secure their release, as well as requiring additional visitations prompted by crises of failure in the availability of game.

When any seriously untoward conditions or circumstances afflicted or threatened an individual or the community, the question of their source was immediately raised. This entailed ascertaining both the

spiritual agency responsible, and whatever specific human offense to the responsible spirit might be the source of the crisis. And here, the role of the one indigenous Inuit religious specialist — the *angakkuq* (pl.: *angakkuit*) — assumed a central place.

Recognition as an angakkuq entailed the possession of a special ability to communicate with the world of spirits and it was by means of this ability that angakkuit were able to divine and rectify the problematic relations with the spirit world that brought misfortune (Laugrand et al. 2000:16; Rasmussen 1931:2). The principle functions of angakkuit accordingly included assuring the availability of game, healing the sick, and controlling the weather. They also served to combat threats posed by evil spirits, and exercised their divinatory powers more broadly in mundane ways to reveal “the things that to others are hidden” (Laugrand et al. 2000:28, 108; Rasmussen 1929:109; 1931:294). Essential to the ability of angakkuit to function in their role was the acquisition of one or more (typically several) “spirit helpers,” and the decisive factor in determining whether a person became an angakkuq or not was the fact of experiencing an encounter with such a spirit (Laugrand et al. 2000:20, 42, 44, 100, 102; Weyer 1932:425–428). The helping spirits enlisted by angakkuit were typically glossed as *tuurngait* (sing.: *tuurngaq*), although other terms of reference for these spirits are reported as well (Laugrand et al. 2000:42, 98). It was through control of their *tuurngait* that the angakkuit’s special abilities and access to the spirit world could be exercised on behalf of the community and dramatically demonstrated in séances where possession by *tuurngait* would often occur (Weyer 1932:425–428). The power that an angakkuq’s control of *tuurngait* bestowed, however, could also upon occasion be put to malevolent or selfish ends, and anyone recognized as a particularly potent angakkuq could accordingly be regarded with a measure of ambivalence and fear (Laugrand et al. 2000:96).

The variety of spirits that might possibly serve as the *tuurngait* of an angakkuq appears to have been virtually limitless. They could include the spirits of living or dead beings, and might be the spirits of humans, of animals, or even of inanimate objects (Laugrand et al. 2000:44, 46, 88–92, 106, 110–116; Weyer 1932:425–428). The different *tuurngait* exercised specific functions or powers, which the angakkuit who controlled them were then able to exercise through their mastery of the

spirits (Laugrand et al. 2000:74–76). The numbers of *tuurngait* recorded and described in some locales are impressive; a list compiled by James Peck, a missionary to southern Baffin Island, included some 347 entries, each with its own name and distinctive appearance and traits (Laugrand et al. 2000:136–188; Peck 2006:397–468).

Relations between *angakkuit* and their *tuurngait* varied and were subject to change over time. In the case of the Netsilik, *tuurngait* might initially function as demanding masters in their relations with a novice *angakkuq*, but as the *angakkuq* gained competence, control of the *tuurngait* in turn increased; the most powerful *angakkuit* were those who had achieved the most effective mastery of their spirits (Balikci 1989:225–226). Relations with *tuurngait* were often ambivalent. The spirits could vary considerably in their readiness to act independently of their master's control. Upon occasion they could turn upon their masters and attack them, and the distinction between *tuurngait* and evil spirits was not a clear one (Balikci 1967:384; 1989:225–226; Laugrand et al. 2000:94, 104–106).

In the *séances* where *angakkuit* enlisted their *tuurngait* as instruments for communication with the spirit world, the *angakkuq* might take on the speech, the demeanor, or even the appearance of a possessing *tuurngaq*. Alternatively, the *angakkuq*'s own spirit might be enabled to take flight and in the course of the *séance* the encounters and experiences of the *angakkuq*'s spirit in its journey through the spirit world would be acted out. These journeys would commonly be undertaken to visit the sea spirit, but also might include a journey to the moon, or visits to the land and spirits of the dead. *Séances* provided the *angakkuit* with the opportunity to display their seemingly miraculous powers to the members of their local group, although individual abilities and reputations when it came to such displays and abilities decidedly varied (Weyer 1932:421–432). Importantly, as will be noted below, these performances were likely to call for a significant amount of interaction between the assembled members of the community and the possessed or spiritually transformed *angakkuq*. This interaction often entailed communications from the spirit world that would be highly opaque in character, and which often involved the *angakkuq*'s use of a distinctive language or terminology (Laugrand et al. 2000:22–24).

Members of the community who were not necessarily regarded as angakkuit, as well as those who were, could upon occasion invoke the participation of helping spirits for the performance of a type of divination known as *qilaniq*. This divination procedure involved using a thong or some other material to lift the head or leg of a prone individual. The assisting spirit was believed to cause the head or leg to be more or less heavy, in response to questions posed to it by the diviner, with the apparent heaviness or lightness implying “yes” or “no” in answer to the question, depending on local tradition. *Qilaniq* was used to diagnose illness, forecast future events, or gain access to other sorts of desired but hidden knowledge such as the direction in which game might be found, the location of lost objects, etc. (Jenness 1923:211–216; Laugrand et al. 2000:36–38; Weyer 1932:443–444).

In the face of problematic relations with the spirit world that were viewed as posing a threat to human welfare, séances and sometimes *qilaniq* performances served to ascertain and confirm the particular human actions that could be linked to the trouble confronting the community. It was here that the links between human actions and spiritually inflicted sanctions were publicly identified, and the rules of human conduct predicated on spirit intentions accordingly created and affirmed.

### **Making Law for the Spirits**

John M. Roberts’ (1964) perspective on the management of culture in nonliterate societies is particularly pertinent to understanding the social processes involved in sustaining a complex system of rules in the context of indigenous Inuit society. The culture of any society — the body of socially acquired and transmitted understandings its members use to interpret experience and generate behavior — can be viewed as “an ‘information economy’ in which information is received or created, stored, retrieved, transmitted, utilized, and even lost” (Roberts 1964:438). The Inuit “information economy” that functioned to create, maintain, and modify the body of Inuit spiritual norms was dependent on the mechanisms that commonly function in the absence of writing. Only after the arrival of the missionaries and the spread of the system of syllabics they introduced did Inuit society acquire a



system through which a religious tradition — in this case mission Christianity — could be recorded in the indigenous language.

A key functional constraint on the information economy of oral cultures, of course, is the inherent limitation of the individual mind as a storage unit. No single human brain is capable of storing the whole of the body of knowledge and understandings that constitute even the simplest culture (Roberts 1964:439). Storage and retrieval of the information essential to the maintenance of an ongoing body of cultural tradition thus entails collective processes, processes functioning at a group rather than an individual level. Any occasion that brings individuals together and facilitates interpersonal communication “is a time when information can be stored, scanned, and retrieved,” and religious ceremonies constitute precisely one such occasion (Roberts 1964:441).<sup>2</sup> Decision-making processes are also significant, in that they draw out and rehearse the relevant informational resources of a group and at the same time modify the information that the group will carry forward (Roberts 1964:442).

In the case at hand, there is some evidence of occasions of deliberate collective rehearsal of individuals’ recollections of relevant rules in a group context. Stefansson, for example, notes that in the western arctic region adjacent to Canada, this process could be observed regarding food taboos. “Whenever people of different districts meet at a meal,” he notes, “some one, perhaps the hostess, would recite all the taboos which she knew which were appropriate to that meal, and then would ask one of her guests whether he knew any in addition. He would then contribute what his hostess had omitted; then a second guest would be appealed to, and when all the taboos which all of those present knew of had been clearly called to mind, the meal would go on” (1962:408).

Other mechanisms were at work as well. Much as Calum Carmichael (1985, 1992, 2006) has noted in the case of biblical laws, narratives and rules often were linked in the oral traditions of the Inuit. Recitations of the folklore detailing the activities of the spirit beings

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<sup>2</sup> In the case of the Copper Inuit, Jenness observed that although séances could be held on any occasion at any place at any time of the year, they were most frequently staged in winter “when the concentration of families in a single camp gave more intensity and fervor to social and religious life” (Jenness 1923:195).

inhabiting the Inuit cosmos and their interactions with humans, in Rasmussen's view, could arguably be viewed as "the source of all their religious ideas" (Rasmussen 1931:207). Prominent in these narratives were precisely those human actions that would prove spiritually offensive and court crisis or disaster for humankind (e.g., Rasmussen 1929:57, 123–129; 1931:207–213). There is no way of knowing, of course, in what measure the traditional narratives may have been constructed to justify the rules that were embedded in them, or in what measure the rules might be viewed as a product of the stories. But whatever the basis of the link, the stories would have served as a significant vehicle for the ongoing collective rehearsal of the rules. Recitation of the folklore was one of the primary sources of entertainment the Inuit enjoyed, particularly during the prolonged period of enforced relative idleness during the dark period (Boas 1964:164), and it was also, as one of Rasmussen's informants noted, how "mothers and grandmothers put little children to sleep." And, the same informant went on to note, "It is from this we have all our knowledge, for children never forget" (Rasmussen 1931:207).

Particularly significant throughout much of the Canadian Arctic was the story of the sea spirit, known, as already noted, by various names in various locations. This myth contains a variety of rich (and varying) details in many of the early records from different informants in different parts of the arctic, but the key elements of the myth can be found even in one of the most abbreviated examples, recorded by Rasmussen from the Netsilik woman Nalungiaq:

Everything came from the ground, and people themselves lived on the ground at the time there were no animals to hunt. And they knew nothing of all the strict taboo that we have to observe now. For no dangers threatened them; but on the other hand no pleasures awaited them after a long day's toil... Then it happened that a little orphan girl was thrown out into the sea when some people were putting over a fjord in kayaks tied together... Nobody cared about the orphan girl and so she was pushed into the sea when she was trying to get unobserved on to the kayak-raft with the others. But that wickedness turned her into a great spirit, the greatest of all spirits we fear up here. She became Nuliajuk and made the animals that we hunt. It was thus she took revenge, for now everything comes from her — everything that people love or fear — food and clothes, hunger and bad hunting, abundance or lack of caribou, seals, meat and blubber. And for her sake people had afterwards to think out all the taboo rules that make it hard to live.

For now they no longer lived on the ground but on shy and live game. (Rasmussen 1931:212–213)

The essential elements here — an orphan girl thrown into the sea, who becomes the source and the guardian of the animals humans depend upon (in many versions, her fingers are chopped off as she tries to re-enter a kayak, and they become the sea mammals), and her sensitivity to rules of respect for the animals and her control accordingly of their availability to humans — are central components of virtually all of the versions of the story throughout the area where it appears. This myth provided a significant, and widespread, charter for Inuit responses to the threat or experience of failure in the food quest. Rasmussen's account of the angakkuq's typical annual journey to the sea spirit among the Iglulik provides an example:

The girl who was thrown into the sea... sends nearly all the misfortunes which are regarded by dwellers on earth as the worst and direst... It is not strange therefore, that it is regarded as one of a shaman's greatest feats to visit her where she lives at the bottom of the sea, and so tame and conciliate her that human beings can live once more untroubled on earth... The journey may be undertaken at the instance of a single individual... But it may also be made on behalf of a whole village threatened by famine and death owing to the scarcity of game. As soon as such occasion arises, all adult members of the community assemble in the house from which the shaman is to start. (Rasmussen 1929:123–124)

In his journey to the bottom of the sea, the angakkuq learns that it is the breaches of taboo that bar the way of the animals to the world of humans. Upon his return, accordingly, “all in the house must confess any breaches of taboo they have committed... all must confess, and thus much comes to light which no one had ever dreamed of; everyone learns his neighbors' secrets” (Rasmussen 1929:128).

### *Trouble Cases and Angakkuq Performances*

Occasions of actual or threatened of misfortune almost invariably triggered efforts to diagnose the spiritual agents that could be held responsible and the reasons for their troubling behavior. As a result of these efforts, afflictions might be attributed to sorcery on the part of some angakkuq malevolently deploying the power of her or his helping

spirits, or to the malevolent action of the shade of a deceased human.<sup>3</sup> But as in Rasmussen's foregoing description of a typical visit to the sea spirit, the threat or experience of misfortune provided the preeminent occasion for the collective retrieval of a group's knowledge of the potentially offensive human actions that could serve to disrupt harmonious relations with the spirit world. This was accomplished through the performance of a *séance* that involved the rehearsal of a litany of possible offenses in the form of well-recognized taboos, but that might also include the proposal of possible novel offenses (e.g., Jenness 1923:204). The *séance* would also incorporate the means necessary to restore harmony with the spirits involved. These invariably included confession, perhaps the specification of some compensatory acts, and the ongoing recognition of the relevant rules (familiar or novel) of conduct.

Situations of misfortune and the Inuit response to them bear a fundamental similarity to those situations that ethnographers have often favored as foci for the socio-legal investigation of non-Western normative systems. Efforts to achieve an authoritative resolution to situations of social disruption or conflict have been a common point of entry into the analysis of indigenous systems of "law." Through the processing of such "trouble cases" (Llewellyn and Hoebel 1941:293–294; Nader and Todd 1978:4–8) and their authoritative resolution, the rules that function as actual instruments of social control within a group, a community, or a society, are effectively identified, defined and communicated (Pospisil 1971:18–37). The goal of restoring a breached or broken relationship may also prominently inform the processing of these cases (e.g., Gluckman 1955; Llewellyn and Hoebel 1941).

In the case of Inuit relations with the spirit world, and the rules governing human relations with spiritual beings, occasions of actual or threatened misfortune functioned in effect as trouble cases. It was on such occasions that Inuit sought to remedy what was perceived to be a breach of harmonious relations with some offending spiritual entity. The resulting efforts to forestall or alleviate misfortune through the restoration of benign relations with the world of spirits not only gen-

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<sup>3</sup>) Diamond Jenness' observations among the Copper Inuit in 1915 and 1916 provide some firsthand accounts of such cases (Jenness 1923:203–217).

erated rehearsal and speculation about the human actions that were the source of the problem. The process also provided the principal occasion on which the norms of human conduct that would forestall or remedy the trouble at issue were authoritatively specified and communicated.

Observations of efforts to identify the sources of current or threatened misfortunes through séances performed by angakkuit are extensively reported in early ethnographic accounts from the Canadian arctic. It is clear from these accounts that while their special access to the world of spirits led angakkuit to be called upon to discern the specific human actions that the spirits deemed offensive, the assembled members of that community played a significant role in the process as well. Angakkuit, acting through the agency of their familiar spirits, often served as a vehicle for the assembled community members themselves to provide both the suggestion and the confirmation of the actions that the spirits found offensive.

The most well-known and comprehensive early record of an angakuq's performance provides a paradigmatic portrait of the interaction between angakuq and audience (Rasmussen 1929:132–141). The performance took place as a healing ritual on 24 January 1923 on Southampton Island at the camp of the angakuq Angutimmarik. In mid-August 1922, two of the members of Knud Rasmussen's Fifth Thule Expedition — Jacob Olsen and Therkel Mathiassen — had traveled from the base camp of the expedition to conduct two weeks of archeological excavations at a site that also served as a temporary camp for Angutimmarik and his wife. When ice floes prevented Olsen and Mathiassen from returning to the base camp at the end of their work, stranding them without provisions of their own, they accepted Angutimmarik's hospitality and accompanied him to his winter camp where they remained until the following February (Saladin d'Anglure 2001:103–105). It was in the course of this sojourn with the Inuit, during a time when the camp was enduring serious hardships, that Olsen, himself an Inuk from Greenland who understood the local dialect, penned a detailed description and verbatim transcript of the 24 January performance. Originally written in Greenlandic by Olsen, the account was published in English by Knud Rasmussen (1929:132–141) as part of his report on the intellectual culture of the Iglulik.

Mathiassen, in his diary, recorded a sequence of intense shamanistic activities from 12 December to 27 January, including performances by Angutimmarik as well as other angakkuik present in the camp (Oosten 1984; Saladin d'Anglure 2001:106, 131–133). Oosten (1984:386–387) has suggested that this sequence may have included significant calendrical elements relating to the winter solstice and the transition to the winter/spring portion of the annual cycle focused on seal hunting. Rather than a response to bad caribou hunting (as Mathiassen himself had suggested) in the season that was terminating, the timing of the intense activity that Mathiassen observed, Oosten notes, could well be associated with calendrical efforts to ensure good hunting in the forthcoming season (Oosten 1984:386–387). Insofar as calendrical séances were incorporated into the Inuit ritual calendar, here and elsewhere, this would of course serve to provide for the regularized elicitation of the rule-affirming and rulemaking processes that the séances afforded. But the 24 January performance also took place in the context of a camp faced with serious shortages of food and recurrent illnesses, and was one of a series during this period that was directed toward treatment of the sick (Saladin d'Anglure 2001:150; Oosten 1984:386–387).

On 22 January, a female angakkuq in the camp, Nanuraq, had fallen ill and been treated by another angakkuq, Makkik, in the course of whose performance some sixteen causes — broken taboos — had been identified as responsible for her illness. Another séance the following morning, this one performed by Angutimmarik, revealed that for five days Olsen and Mathiassen must not eat meat cooked by Nanuraq. At noon the same day, and again that evening, performances were also staged for Nanuraq's benefit. The evening performance, lasting one and one-half hours, was carried out by three angakkuik in the camp (including Angutimmarik), and resulted in some 24 causes for Nanuraq's illness being identified (Saladin d'Anglure 2001:106).

The performance recorded by Olsen on 24 January, conducted by Angutimmarik, was yet another effort to heal Nanuraq and conformed to a pattern that Rasmussen suggested was particularly common among the local Inuit (Saladin d'Anglure 2001:131). In the course of it, the angakkuq — Angutimmarik — served as a medium through which a helping spirit could be questioned. With the help of suggestions from the audience, the angakkuq's questioning of the helping

spirit served to pinpoint causes of the patient's illness. The patient herself had in turn to confess her breaches of the rules, and the audience for its part would plead for the indulgence of the spirits (Saladin d'Anglure 2001:131). The role of the angakkuq, tuurngaq, and patient is illustrated in the following brief sample of extracts from Olsen's lengthy record of Angutimmarik's performance, as it appears in Rasmussen's (1929:132–141) published English version:

A woman named Nanoraq, the wife of Makik, lay very ill, with pains all over her body. The patient, who was so ill that she could hardly stand upright, was placed on the bench. All the inhabitants of the village were summoned, and Angutimmarik [the angakkuq] enquired of his spirits as to the cause of the disease... "It is you, you are Aksharquarnlik, I ask you, my helping spirit, whence comes the suffering from which this person is suffering? Is it due to something I have eaten in defiance of taboo, lately or long since? Or is it due to the one who is wont to lie beside me, my wife? Or is it brought about by the sick woman herself? Is she herself the cause of the disease?" The patient answers: "The sickness is due to my own fault. I have but ill fulfilled my duties. My thoughts have been bad and my actions evil." The shaman interrupts her and continues: "It looks like peat, and yet is not really peat. It is that which is behind the ear, something that looks like the cartilage of the ear? There is something that gleams white. It is the edge of a pipe, or what can it be?" The listeners cry all at once: "She has smoked a pipe that she ought not to have smoked. But never mind. We will not take any notice of that. Let her be forgiven. Tauva!"...

Shaman:... Now once more something appears before my eyes, forbidden food and sinews of caribou." Listeners: "Once more she has combed her hair although she was unclean. Let her be released from that; let it be taken away from her. Let her get well. Tauva!" Shaman: "Yet again I catch a glimpse of forbidden occupations carried on in secret. They appear before my eyes. I can just perceive them." Listeners: "While she was lying on a caribou skin from an animal killed while shedding its coat in the spring, she had a miscarriage, and she kept it secret, and her husband, all unwitting, lay down on the same skin where that had taken place, and so rendered himself unclean for his hunting!"...

Shaman: "She is not yet released... I see a fur garment. It looks as if it belonged to some sick person. I suppose it cannot be anyone else who has used it, who has borrowed it?" Listeners: "Oh yes, it is true, she lent a fur coat to someone at a time when she was unclean." Shaman: "I can still see a piece of sole leather chewed through and through, a piece of sole leather being softened." Patient: "The spotted seal from the skin of which I removed the hair, and the meat of which I ate, though it was taboo." Listeners: "Let it pass. Let her be released from that. Let her get well." Shaman: "Return to life, I see you now returning in good health among the living... Name but one more instance of forbidden food, all the men you have lain with though you were unclean, all the

food you have swallowed, old and new offenses, forbidden occupations exercised or was it a lamp that you borrowed?" Patient: "Alas yes, I did borrow the lamp of one dead. I have used a lamp that belonged to a dead person." Listeners: "Even though it be so, let it be removed. Let all evils be driven far away, that she may get well." ... (Rasmussen 1929:133, 138, 140)

In the complete course of Angutimmarik's performance, a decidedly impressive variety of rules are once again, as on the previous days noted by Mathiassen, publicly expressed and affirmed. What is noteworthy here is the fact that the angakkuq's performance is not preeminently a "top down" assertion, revelation, or recitation of the rules on the part of a religious specialist, performing the role of a medium. On the contrary, Olsen's detailed record reveals much more of a "bottom up" process, in which the role of the angakkuq is largely one of eliciting, while the audience (and patient) are largely responsible for suggesting and confirming, the norms that the performance provides the occasion for publicly recognizing (Rasmussen 1929:132–141; Saladin d'Anglure 2001:107–129). The performance, in effect, provides a context in which, in Roberts' (1964) terms, the informational resources collectively stored in the minds of the assembled members of the community are publicly scanned, retrieved and expressed.

Efforts to discern sources of spirit displeasure could also easily serve to elicit novel possibilities. In contexts where a community was facing some sort of affliction, actions already known to cause offense to the spirit world would of course suggest possible explanations for the difficulty at hand. But so could any actions that might seem somehow connected to the circumstances in question. One example of this is the Inuit reactions to the excavations conducted by Olsen and Mathiassen prior to their extended sojourn in Angutimmarik's camp. Subsequent illnesses experienced by Olsen and Mathiassen, and by others in the camp, were ascribed by local angakkuit to the "hammering of the earth" and other excavation activities undertaken by the pair in the course of their archeological work (Oosten 1984:378). Another example is provided by Diamond Jenness (1923). In December 1915 Jenness was party to a séance held to determine why seals had become scarce and to secure their return to the hunting ground where they could be taken (1923:204). In the course of the séance, which included elicitation of tabooed activities such as making new deerskin clothing



and boiling caribou meat as possible causes of the seals' absence, the angakkuq noticed Jenness standing nearby with his pipe in his mouth and informed the group by his gestures that the seals refused to rise to the surface because of the taint of Jenness' tobacco. Jenness, however, was able to forestall further problems with his smoking by offering an alternative interpretation of its likely effects: "I told the natives that just as the smoke floated up to the air, so the seals would float up top the surface, and they quite agreed with this interpretation" (Jenness 1923:205).

Novel suggestions concerning sources of spirit displeasure were no doubt common enough, and there is no way of knowing how readily such suggestions were either accepted or rejected. But once a novel rule was granted recognition as necessary to avoid misfortune, it could provide yet another addition to the persisting inventory of normative conventions. Jenness (1923:185) provides an example of this as well. He reports how Inuit in the western arctic, visited by Stefansson, had told the Inuit further east with whom he (Jenness) was traveling about a new requirement relating to the caribou. The westerners reported that if a fragment of every caribou skin sold to a white man to be taken out of the country were not cut off, the animals would follow the skin and leave the country as well. Failure to observe the custom when whites had begun appropriating caribou skin had been associated with the near disappearance of herds in the west (in the area of north Alaska and the Mackenzie Delta). Copper Inuit, in the area where Jenness was traveling, could commonly be observed "cutting a corner from each deerskin garment and an ear from each skin they sell to a white man lest their country too should be denuded of game" (Jenness 1923:185).

Inuit mobility patterns — typically involving seasonal concentrations in larger settlements or camps and dispersal and travel in smaller groups at other times of the year — allowed for an ongoing flux in the composition of local groups, as changing ties of kinship, positions of leadership, and interpersonal tensions prompted social realignments (Damas 2002:7–17). One result of this was an ongoing reassembly of the body of individual understandings — the body of personal experiences and knowledge of rules — that stood ready to be drawn out in the performances of local angakkuit. The rules that were affirmed or

emerged in one local area or group could thus easily diffuse and be promulgated elsewhere, helping to sustain their variety and complexity throughout a broad region.

In creating and carrying forward this varied and complex body of rules, the performances of the angakkuik played an essential role. Drawing on the local knowledge constituted by the membership of a particular camp or settlement, they were the vehicle for the production of a public consensus concerning behavior that could be tied to human affliction promulgated by the spirits. This consensus was achieved through the authority of an angakkuq's own special relationship to the world of spirits, coupled with the use of that relationship to generate suggestions and confessions from the assembled members of the community. With the establishment and repeated reconfirmation of these public understandings concerning the spirits' standards for human conduct, it was in the context of angakkuik performances that normative rules rooted in human interactions with the spirit world were effectively created and sustained.

### *Misfortunes, Sanctions and Rules*

It is certainly no surprise that the perception of sanctions would motivate efforts to conform to the norms attributed to interactions with the world of spirits. But what Inuit interactions with that world serve to highlight is the role that ascriptions of punitive intent can play in the processes through which the rules or norms responsible for the sanctions are themselves socially constructed. The experience or threat of misfortune, understood as a sanction delivered by the spirits, was the basis for discerning (or more accurately ascribing) what it was in the minds of the spirits that prompted that misfortune. Some breach in relations with the spirits, some violation of the normative expectations that the spirits held for human actors in relation to them, was deemed responsible. These sanctions — or punishments — for normative violations became the basis for the creation and affirmation of the rules themselves. Misfortune, which communicated trouble or disturbance in human interactions with the spirit world, initiated processes through which the human community sought to identify and affirm the rules of behavior that would serve to rectify or forestall such disturbances.

As Jan Beck and Wolfgang Forstmeier have recently noted, spiritual beings “are typically regarded as acting with intention, and many religious acts aim at influencing these intentions (appeasing the gods). This is consistent with the idea that the development of human social intelligence (the understanding of intentionality) was fundamental to the origin of religious beliefs” (2007:43. See also Boyer and Bergstrom 2008:119–122; Tremlin 2006; Johnson 2005). The process that was at work in Inuit relations with the spirit world is one in which the reactions of interaction partners are the basis for ascriptions of mind or mental states that are in turn the basis for the creation and maintenance of normative understandings. In the human social world, of course, such a process of attribution would be likely to proceed reciprocally, and insofar as both sides of the interaction are motivated to conform to the standards attributed to the other, a mutual convergence of normative expectations will be likely to result (Goodenough 1963:263–264; 1981:104; Wallace 1970:27–34). But whether interaction proceeds with fellow humans or with the world of spirits, this process of norm recognition and norm construction rests on the deployment of ascriptions concerning intentional mental states. For the Inuit, events of misfortune provided the basis for ascriptions of spirit intentions. The “trouble cases” such events represented, and the social processes these in turn initiated, in this way constituted significant revelatory occasions with respect to the rules of conduct the spirits favored in the human world.

The revelatory functions of misfortune, coupled with the rule-sustaining and rulemaking social processes described above that misfortune elicited, suggest a basis for the remarkable scope and variety of the rules necessary to avoid incurring the displeasure of the spirits and to “live untroubled.” The Inuit commitment to the maintenance of “all the old rules of life which are based on the experience and wisdom of generations” that “our fathers have inherited from their fathers” (Rasmussen 1929:56) was coupled with highly effective social processes for repeatedly affirming and perpetuating the established body of inherited rules. Added to this was the openness of these same processes to freely recognize, affirm, and thereby add novel rules based on new perceptions of a link between human actions and the experience of afflictions. In circumstances of misfortune, actions already known to cause offense to the spirit world would regularly be recalled

and reaffirmed. But once publicly recognized and affirmed, actions newly perceived as somehow linked to the avoidance or amelioration of misfortune would constitute additions to this persisting body of tradition. The result would be the efficient creation, maintenance and growth over time of a large and complex body of directives necessary to prevent the displeasure of the spirit world.

As noted earlier, efforts to provide a theoretical account of the remarkable complex of Inuit taboos have not been lacking. In contrast to earlier proposals that the complex of Inuit rules may be a product of the nature of Inuit systems of classification, Riches (1994) has intriguingly suggested that Inuit classification systems may have themselves been constructed “*in order that* those taboos may find a rationale” (Riches 1994:394, italics in original). He then goes on to propose that the existence of the complex system of taboos may find an explanation in the fact that it serves the interests of the Inuit religious specialists — the angakkuit — by helping to sustain their social position of power and privilege. While this may indeed be a function (consequence) of the complex system of Inuit injunctions, the nature of the Inuit rulemaking and rule-sustaining social processes serves to provide an account of how such a complex is created and sustained. And the nature of these processes, in and of themselves, would seem to offer a plausible reason for the impressive scope and variety of injunctions contained within the body of Inuit religious traditions.

These processes, furthermore, would appear to function in the way described above quite independently of the degree of ability or prowess ascribed to any particular angakkuq. It is the context of real or threatened misfortune, and the fact that this context elicits the relevant social processes of publicly expressing and affirming relevant norms of conduct, that generates and sustains the body of rules. Jenness (1923: 205, 207), for example, records examples of what audience members explicitly acknowledged to be incompetent performances or performances by an angakkuq whose powers were not regarded very seriously, but which nonetheless functioned in the usual manner to produce the elicitation and recitation of rules and rule violations.

By the time of the early ethnographic accounts of rulemaking processes and responses to misfortune, particularly in the Eastern Arctic, Canadian Inuit had experienced a long history of Western contact and

exposure to Christianity, through early encounters with whalers and traders and later with Christian missionaries. The fieldwork of the early ethnographers, as noted earlier, was accordingly undertaken at a time of religious change among the Inuit. The resulting process of the Inuit transition to Christianity has been the subject of a significant and growing body of literature (e.g., Laugrand and Oosten 2009; Peck 2006; Remie and Oosten 2002; Oosten and Laugrand 1999; Blaisel et al. 1999; Saladin d'Anglure 1997; Trott 1997; Laugrand 1997; Grant 1997). One of the significant consequences of this transition, underway in the years around the turn of the century, was a change in conventional Inuit understandings of the nature and sources of revelation from the spirit world and the rulemaking processes linked to the discernment of spirit intentions.

The early encounters with whalers and traders which exposed Inuit to Christian practices and teachings were being augmented by at least occasional contacts with missionaries by the early 1800's and permanent mission posts began to be established during the last decades of the century (Laugrand and Oosten 2009; Crowe 1991:145–148). In 1894 the Anglicans arrived on Baffin Island and the mission there initiated instruction in a system of syllabics which enabled the translation and distribution of the Bible, hymnbooks, and other religious texts. These texts, and the knowledge of syllabics which enabled Inuit to read them, ultimately diffused widely to the Inuit camps. Away from the points where Inuit had been directly exposed to them, Christian ideas also spread simply by word of mouth (Blaisel et al. 1999; Oosten and Laugrand 1999; Trott 1997). Where the new religion began to have an effect in areas outside the immediate control of a mission, it was largely through the integration of the new religious concepts with established indigenous traditions. New, syncretic religious movements — movements characterized by novel fusions of Christian and indigenous understandings, creating a body of meanings and symbols distinct from either parent tradition — emerged in the wake of this diffusion (Blaisel et al. 1999; Grant 1997; Trott 1997).

During this period of transition, in many Inuit camps *angakkuit* continued to perform in the traditional fashion, notwithstanding competition in some locations from the leaders of syncretic movements, from the growing number of missions and missionaries, and converts

who not uncommonly included former angakkuit themselves. Ultimately, however, the influence of mission Christianity largely eliminated the role of the angakkuit from the inventory of Inuit religious practices. Accompanying this change, experiences of actual or threatened misfortune lost their revelatory function, in favor of what was revealed in the text of the Bible, either through one's own reading of it or through the authority of those others who might be recognized as particularly qualified to interpret it (Oosten and Laugrand 1999; Trott 1997).

## Conclusion

In a recent article in the *Law and History Review*, David Holland (2008) suggests that a familiar piece of received wisdom in the study of constitutional law — the idea that expansive interpretation of binding texts will be most readily tolerated where formal amendatory appeal to a sovereign seems excessively difficult — may have its parallel in rules derived from the ascription of intentions to the spirit world. “As with American constitutionalism,” he notes, “nineteenth century American Christianity cherished both a created text and a sovereign Creator. The People were to the Constitution what God was to the Bible” (Holland 2008:573). Given a professed devotion to a living sovereign and binding text in both cases, coupled with the manifest difficulties of knowing the sovereign's will, Holland suggests that the same relational dynamics between living sovereign and historical text familiar to constitutional theory can be seen in elements of the Christian tradition. In the nineteenth century context of the Civil War, where events could be viewed as a transcendent message from God, “the assertion of an active and expressive God — a providential sovereign ever at liberty to speak for itself — could sustain, reinforce, and at times even compel a restrictive reading of the sacred text, which might generate an even greater need to assert God's expressive capabilities, and thus the two impulses would feed on each other over time” (Holland 2008:574). Holland's discussion provides an intriguing example of parallel processes at work in human efforts to construct norms derived from intentions attributed to the spirit world, on the one hand, and in the construction of secular “law” on the other.

Like Pelikan's earlier (2004) comparative study of biblical and constitutional interpretation, Holland's study points to the value of using religious contexts as a venue for the study of rule- and lawmaking processes — specifically the processes through which systems of rules or laws are constructed on the basis of intentions ascribed to the world of spiritual beings. Both Holland and Pelikan, of course, are concerned with a religious context involving the interpretation of "scripture" in Gifford's (2005:381) sense of the term: a text that a religious community persists in according an authoritative position in its life and that the community may regard as "the supreme source of their 'doctrine' or 'morals' or 'law'." Where interpretations derived from the content of a scriptural text are thus an important source for the authoritative ascription of spirit intentions, these ascriptions will obviously rest on processes of discernment that are likely very different from those evident among the Inuit. There is no reason, however, to exclude nonliterate traditions, such as the "shamanic" tradition of the Inuit, from comparative studies of revelation and rulemaking that may both be informed by, and inform, socio-legal research in secular contexts.

A case could possibly be made, for example, that the Inuit conform to Holland's observations regarding American Christianity at the time of the Civil War. The Inuit clearly represent a tradition where a sovereign world of spirits regularly engages in the free and active expression of divine intentions, while at the same time the rules enshrined in the "text" of oral tradition are hardly given expansive interpretation. They are, rather, literally and rigidly observed, "in order that we may live untroubled" (Rasmussen 1929:56). The point that deserves emphasis here, in any case, is that analyses of the social processes through which revelation and rulemaking proceed, and the consequences of these processes, can be fruitfully extended to the context of non-literate and non-scriptural religious traditions.

For their part, the Inuit qualify as one example of the many ethnographic cases where beliefs in the spiritual sources of misfortune link such afflictions to instances of strained, disturbed, or disrupted social relations and also provide the institutional means to work to sustain or restore harmony in the relations in question. In contrast to a variety of other familiar ethnographic cases (e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1937; Gluckman 1965:216–267) however, the preeminent emphasis in the Inuit case is on disturbance in social relations between humans and the

multitude of agents occupying the spirit world, rather than on disturbed relations among humans themselves.

Sociological efforts to delineate the role of punitive sanctions have commonly been focused on the formal legal systems deployed by states. The matter of the deterrent effects of such sanctions in the context of the law of the state has been a perennial topic, and the symbolic and communicative significance of a state's punishment regimes has attracted significant attention from the time of Durkheim to the present (e.g., Durkheim 1984; Foucault 1975; Garland 1990; Smith 2008). But there remains the broader question of how the role of sanctions may vary across different rulemaking sites and social contexts. In the context of Inuit relations with the spirit world, perceptions of sanctions emerged not simply as instruments for deterrence, inducing conformity, or signifying normative boundaries, but as key players in the process of creating and maintaining the rules themselves. The role that the harms inflicted by spiritual agents appear to play in the case of the Inuit invites comparative attention to the nature and sources of both similarities and differences in the role of spiritual sanctions in other religious traditions and contexts. And beyond this, one can also raise the question of whether or under what circumstances perceptions of negative sanctions may serve similar functions in the context of strictly secular, strictly human social interaction as well.

Insofar as the belief in spiritual beings entails ascriptions of intentionality to invisible, non-human causal agents, this may become a basis for the construction of systems of normative rules that reflect these ascriptions. The Inuit case points to the value of investigating this process of norm construction through an approach typical of socio-legal investigation, an approach that focuses on how norms are generated, maintained, and changed in the context of social relationships and interactions — relationships and interactions that here incorporate the spirit as well as the human world — rather than on simply describing normative content at any given point in time. The larger point that I hope this exercise in the analysis of Inuit revelation and rulemaking serves to demonstrate, however, is that rulemaking processes in the context of norms predicated on intentions ascribed to the spirit world constitute a legitimate and useful venue for both socio-legal research and religious studies.



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## Beyond the Horizons of Legends: Traditional Imagery and Direct Experience in Medieval Accounts of Asia

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### Abstract

The article deals with several medieval travel accounts about Asia, which were produced during the 13th and 14th centuries, in the time of the so called Mongol mission. These reports were written by Franciscan and also some Dominican missionaries, namely William of Rubruck, John Plano of Carpini, Odoric of Pordenone, John of Marignola, Jordanus Catalanus and a few others. The aim of the article is to analyze the encounter of European travelers' "traditional" ideas about Asia with the actual reality. Did the friars mostly rely on their anticipations, or were they open to new information, even if this could destroy views often advocated by eminent authorities of European medieval thought? The article analyses three "traditional" *topoi*, each of them in the context of the above-mentioned reports: earthly paradise, the kingdom of Prester John and human monsters. All of them belonged to the medieval lore regarding the East, as testified by many literary as well as pictorial documents. Each of the authors adopted a slightly different strategy for how to solve the potential conflicts between "tradition" and experience. Finally, I suggest conceptualizing the problem of "tradition" and experience in medieval travel accounts with reference to a typology of "otherness" created by Karlheinz Ohle. According to Ohle, a "cognitive Other" (1) is an unknown, never encountered Other which can only be imagined, whereas a "normative Other" (2), is an Other which is directly encountered and gradually explored. In my opinion, the friars' medieval travel accounts actually reflect a shift from imagination towards gradual encounter and exploration — in these reports

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the imagined (cognitive) fabulous East gradually turned into an explored (normative) reality.

**Keywords**

medieval mission to Asia, western imagination, encountering “the Other”, personal experience vs. traditional imagery

**Introduction**

During the Mongol invasion of Europe in the early 1240s Europeans unexpectedly encountered people from then unknown parts of the world. This marked the beginning of a period, lasting approximately one century, of intense contacts with the cultures and peoples of Asia. One result of these encounters was a number of noteworthy written accounts, authored mainly by Franciscan missionaries. The goal of this paper is to highlight the significance of these texts as sources of medieval knowledge of Asia, point out their contribution to furthering this knowledge, and above all examine the ways in which individual authors handled their expectations, based on traditional images of Asia, when faced with reality. I will demonstrate that these travelers showed a combination of extraordinary observational skills and original ways of revising various elements of the traditional legends. On a more general level, this paper will also attempt to refine the methodologies used to study Western accounts of “the Others.”

**Describing the Unknown in the Service of Cross and Crown**

The main initiator of European missions to Asia was Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254), who in 1245 dispatched four groups of monks to the khan of Mongolia (Richard 1998). Unfortunately, no reports of the first mission, led by the Franciscan friar Lawrence of Portugal, have been preserved and it remains unclear whether the mission took place at all (Guzman 1971:234).<sup>1</sup> The next mission was more successful: John of Plano Carpini (1182–1252), accompanied by Benedict the

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<sup>1</sup> The dispatching of Lawrence of Portugal is recorded in the letter of Innocent IV “*Dei patris immensa*.”

Pole and, for part of the journey, by Stephan of Bohemia, arrived in Karakorum after the death of Ögedei Khan and witnessed the enthronement of his son Güyük. After his return in 1247, Carpini produced a detailed report (*Sinica Franciscana*:27–130),<sup>2</sup> complemented by another written account attributed to his companion Benedict (*Hystoria Tartarorum*). No direct testimonies are available about the two other embassies, one led by Andrew of Longjumeau and the other by his fellow Dominican friar Ascelin of Lombardia. There are only indirect accounts in the encyclopedia *Speculum Historiale* by Vincent of Beauvais (†1264) and the *Chronica Majora* by Matthew Paris (†1259) (Guzman 1971:236–249). The *Speculum Historiale* draws on Carpini's account and on a now lost report by Simon of St. Quentin.<sup>3</sup>

King Louis IX of France also sent an emissary to the Mongols with an aim to establish relations. In 1253, the Flemish Franciscan William of Rubruck (1215–1270)<sup>4</sup> was originally only sent to Sartaq Khan in the steppes of today's southern Russia, but in the end he travelled all the way to Great Khan Möngke (1209–1259) in Karakorum. On his return to France in 1255 he recorded detailed observations in his *Itinerarium* (*Sinica Franciscana*:164–332).<sup>5</sup> One of the other Franciscans deployed in Asia, John of Montecorvino (1247–1328),<sup>6</sup> became archbishop of Kambalyk (today's Beijing).

Less known to Europeans at that time but very noteworthy in many ways was a report by another Franciscan, Odoric of Pordenone (1286–1331).<sup>7</sup> Sent by the pope on an extensive journey through Asia in 1316–1330, he sailed via Constantinople to Baghdad, Sri Lanka and on to Canton and Kambalyk. From there he travelled back on land and probably became the first European to visit Tibet. On his

<sup>2</sup> For an English translation of his report see Dawson (1955:3–72).

<sup>3</sup> Chapters which Vincent of Beauvais recorded as coming from the report of Simon of Saint-Quentin were published by Jean Richard separately as *Histoire des Tartares*.

<sup>4</sup> About his life and journey see Jackson (1990:1–55); *Lexikon des Mittelalters* IX (1998:184–185).

<sup>5</sup> For an English translation of his report see Dawson (1955:89–220) or Jackson (1990:61–278).

<sup>6</sup> For details of his life see Rachewiltz (1971:160–172). His letters are published in *Sinica Franciscana*:340–355. For an English translation see Dawson (1955:224–231), or Yule (1866a:197–218).

<sup>7</sup> For details of his life and journeys see Rachewiltz (1971:179–186).

return to Padua in 1330, already in poor health he dictated his memories of the pilgrimage to a fellow Franciscan friar, William of Solagna. Odoric's narrative (*Sinica Franciscana*:413–495)<sup>8</sup> became a major source of information for *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, whose fame and popularity overshadowed by far the memories of Odoric (cf. Higgins 1997).

Last but not least, European knowledge about Asia was significantly enhanced by the travel writings of the famous Venetian trader Marco Polo (1254–1324),<sup>9</sup> who spent 24 years travelling in Asia.

Particularly important for the exploration of India are the notes of the Dominican missionary Jordanus (†around 1336). He first visited India in 1320/21–1328; he was supposed to return in 1330 as the bishop of Kollam, where he probably later died (Gadrat 2005:65–67). Before his second departure, Jordanus left behind a description of his observations, entitled *Mirabilia Descripta*.<sup>10</sup> A special type of primary source is the work of John of Marignola (†1358/59),<sup>11</sup> an Italian Franciscan commissioned by Emperor Charles IV to write a chronicle of international as well as Bohemian history; the text includes Marignola's experiences from a journey to India and China undertaken in 1338–1352/53.

Before analyzing these texts, it is important to examine shortly what the authors themselves say about their own sources (cf. Guéret-Laferté 1994:113–160). The travelers were fairly careful to separate their own observations from second-hand knowledge. This separation is most visible in the accounts by the Franciscans Carpini, Rubruck, Montecorvino and Odoric, who all adopted the form of travel narratives.

<sup>8</sup>) For an English translation of his report see Yule (1866a:43–162).

<sup>9</sup>) For details regarding Marco Polo see Yule (1993); for an English edition of Polo's text see *The Travels I–II*.

<sup>10</sup>) On Jordanus, see *Lexikon des Mittelalters* VI (1983:1574). For the Latin text of the *Mirabilia* with a German translation see *Mirabilia Descripta*; the Latin text with a French translation can be found in Gadrat (2005). For an English translation see Catalani (2005).

<sup>11</sup>) For details on John of Marignola see *Lexikon des Mittelalters* IV (1989:292). For his narrative in Latin see *Kronika Marignolova*; an English translation of selected parts can be found in Yule (1866b:335–394). For further information on his narrative see Hilgers 1980.

These authors predominantly describe their own experiences, accompanied by more detailed expositions on the regions they visited, the peoples they met and their customs. For explanations of unknown phenomena and customs they typically relied on their local guides as well as on other Christians they met on their way.<sup>12</sup> To establish their credibility, they usually assure the reader in the preface or the conclusion of their texts that they only render the truth, based either on their own observation or on reports they heard from persons they regarded as trustworthy. Odoric says exactly this in the conclusion of his account (*Sinica Franciscana*:494). Rubruck states at the beginning of his report that, in line with the king's order, he has depicted everything the way he witnessed it (*Sinica Franciscana*:164). Carpini, besides assuring the reader of his credibility, also expresses a wish that his report should be quoted properly:

We beg all those who read the foregoing account not to cut out or add anything, for, with truth as guide, we have written everything that we have seen or heard from others who we believe are to be trusted and, as God is witness, we have not knowingly added anything. (Dawson 1955:71; Lat. *Sinica Franciscana*:129–130)

It seems as if this comment fittingly anticipated the writing of the most popular travel book of that time, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (cf. Deluz 1988). As I. M. Higgins points out, Mandeville in many cases unfolds his fantasies precisely where Odoric, one of his main sources, ends his authentic descriptions (Higgins 1997:143).

The other authors were less explicit when it came to defining their sources. One reason of this in Polo's case is probably that his narrative covers large number of years and a very extensive geographical area (Yule 1993:108). With Jordanus, the somewhat lighter genre of his *Mirabilia Descripta* must have been one of the reasons: Bound by no specific instruction on what he had to report, his primary goal was to intrigue the reader — as the title already suggests — with “things astounding.” Yet, rather than being a product of mere fantasy, his work also includes much valuable information, albeit interspersed with mythical motifs adopted from the traditional European imagery of the

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<sup>12)</sup> Thus Carpini reported having collected information from Russian priests and other Christians living at the khan's court (*Sinica Franciscana*:75, 125).



East. Marignola too was limited by the genre of his text; he had to “smuggle” his travel experiences into the chronicle through digressions from his expositions on the world’s biblical history and geography.

It is obvious that the purpose of compiling these texts differed, which is most apparent from the aforementioned examples of Marignola and Jordanus. With these two authors, I will primarily focus on the way they present reality and reconcile it with traditional imagery, an issue the two had to face despite the fact that their accounts were not primarily intended as sources of encyclopedic knowledge about Asia. A comparison of travelogues with texts of other genres will also help us to better understand how medieval travelers constructed their image of the East.

### **The Medieval Image of the East and its Study**

The travelers of the 13th and 14th century set out on their journeys with certain predetermined images of the East in mind; these were based on earlier accounts by authors of antiquity, who wrote primarily about “India,”<sup>13</sup> as well as by the authorities of the Christian era, above all Isidore of Seville (†636) and other encyclopedists.<sup>14</sup> Images of the East were also widely reflected in the fine arts. During their journeys, the medieval missionaries had to confront their expectations with reality, which in many cases completely differed from what they had imagined. The proportion of space these authors devoted to traditional imagery and to their personal observations, as well as the manner in which they reconciled the two, differs among the texts. The differences are based on a range of factors, including the genre and purpose of the work, the intended audience and, last but not least, potential interventions by later editors (cf. Ostrowski 1990). A detailed analysis of these

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<sup>13</sup> The exact meaning of the term “India” often varies in ancient and medieval sources. It was used not only to designate the Indian subcontinent, but also parts of China, North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula or Ethiopia. Among the most important ancient authors writing about India Ctesias of Knidos and Megasthenes can be mentioned.

<sup>14</sup> Motifs of East can be found also in the literature concerning Alexander the Great, as well as in various bestiaries such as *Liber de natura rerum* by Thomas of Cantimpré (1201–1278). For an overview, see Lach (1994).

differences for each individual author, or even for each version of their manuscripts, would in itself suffice for an extensive study. Here I will limit myself to the analysis of the relationship between empirical knowledge, acquired through direct observation, and traditional beliefs in the travelogues of that period. I will also attempt to point out various aspects of this type of enquiry that need to be taken into account and to show what implications they may have for the conceptualization of the research question.

What was then the traditional image of the mythical East in the minds of these missionaries as they were setting out on their journeys? There was obviously no authoritative canon, and images of the East appeared in different numbers and modifications. Yet some can be described as almost universal, including those that appear, for example, in the world maps from that time.<sup>15</sup> In order to analyze in more detail how these authors worked with these traditional images, I will focus on three frequently recurring motifs associated with the earth's eastern lands and trace them and their contexts in the individual authors' accounts. The three motifs include those of, (1) the earthly paradise, (2) the mythical empire of Prester John, and (3) human monsters. These represent only a narrow selection from a much more abundant medieval imagination; the purpose of this selection is above all to show specific examples of a high diversity and originality in the aforementioned authors' approaches.

The study of images in texts from the remote past has one potential methodological pitfall: Edward Said's theory of Orientalism (Said 1978) has prompted scholars to study western ideas about the East in various types of texts and time periods and to uncover the background and process of the formation of these ideas (cf. Inden 1990; Clarke 1997; Lopez 1998 etc.). Yet this interest in representations may encourage ahistorical attitudes (Macfie 2000:4–6); some scholars tend to study the historical transformations of a certain image, often without a sufficient understanding of the original context in which the image was deployed. What at first sight may seem as a consistent image associated with the East — such as the figure of Prester John — in reality acquired different forms and meanings in different texts,

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<sup>15</sup> E.g. the maps from Hereford (around 1276–83) or Ebstorf (around 1235).

depending on factors including genre, language and the author's social background. An analysis of these representations outside their original contexts may result in an application of today's scholarly constructs — such as the assumed body of traditional images associated in medieval Europe with the East — to what are typologically different texts. A simple comparison of isolated images in different texts may result in the conclusion that a mere appearance of a traditional mythical motif in a written account is evidence of the author's excessive dependence on European stereotypes and his or her inability to authentically perceive and describe reality.<sup>16</sup>

On the following pages I will attempt to demonstrate that the relationship in the aforementioned travelogues between traditional imagery and empirical knowledge based on direct observation is much more complex than previously thought. The two sources of knowledge may not necessarily contradict each other; on the contrary, the authors may deploy them as two complementary colors on the unusually rich palette of the “authentic” medieval imagery of reality. To demonstrate that, I will first analyze in detail the selected medieval images of the East in individual works and then discuss their overall context as well as their authors' narrative and interpretive strategies.

### **Within Earshot of Paradise?**

Jean Delumeau has demonstrated that the concept of a paradisiacal land has its roots in classical antiquity; in the Christian context the image of paradise was based on the biblical narrative, and the following passage contributed to its localization in the east: “And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.” (*Gn* 2:8) (Delumeau 2000:44–45). Early interpreters debated whether paradise was a real place or an allegory, but gradually the former opinion prevailed, partly thanks to St Augustine of Hippo (†430). Many prominent medieval scholars also describe paradise as a real place on earth, including Isidore of Seville, the Venerable Bede (673–736) and Peter Lombard (†1160) (Delumeau

<sup>16</sup> L. Olschki on Marco Polo's *Million* (Olschki 1972:15); several scholars have adopted his opinion, e.g. Lach (1994:35, note 105), and Jones (1971:399).

2000:44–46). The Garden of Eden can also be found in the most detailed world maps of that time, namely the Ebstorf map (around 1235) and the Hereford Mappa Mundi (around 1276–83).

In medieval travelogues, however, this motif appears much less frequently and the notions of what it may look like to some extent vary. Carpini and Rubruck make no reference to paradise on earth at all, which seems to suggest that it did not even occur to them that they could come anywhere near it. After all, given the hardship they report having faced on the way, they could have called their travels a “road to hell” rather than a journey to paradise. Odoric and Polo do not mention any eastern paradise either, although they do not shy away from other motifs of the medieval mythology. The letters written by Montecorvino show that he reflected on this notion, but despite all his effort had to admit he was not able to find out anything about this eastern paradise (*Sinica Franciscana*:342).

Jordanus briefly discusses paradise in a section of his work devoted to a mythical land he calls India Tertia. This textual framing of paradise is of major significance, as at the beginning of the chapter Jordanus states he did not visit India Tertia himself, only learned about the region from trustworthy persons (*Mirabilia Descripta*:134). Jordanus says that paradise is situated between India Tertia and Ethiopia and that there are four rivers flowing from paradise,<sup>17</sup> bringing with them gold and precious stones (*Mirabilia Descripta*:136). Living around one of the rivers are dragons, whose heads are topped with shiny carbuncles. Because of their large weight, the dragons tend to fall into that river, an event local people eagerly await; after seventy days only bones are left of a fallen dragon, after which time people take the carbuncle from the dragon’s skeleton and bring it to Prester John, the king of Ethiopia (*Mirabilia Descripta*:134).

While Jordanus’ paradise is part of the mythical India Tertia, in Marignola’s chronicle the account of paradise is directly connected with his exposition on early biblical history: “God planted paradise at the beginning, in the eastern part, this place beyond India is called Eden.” (my translation, Lat. *Kronika Marignolova*:494). Marignola is

<sup>17)</sup> *Gn* 2,10–14. The names of these four biblical rivers are Pishon, Gihon, Chidekel and Euphrat.

the only one of the travelers under discussion who discusses paradise in more detail and who believes that he stood in its immediate proximity. He reports having erected a stone column with an inscription, a cross and his as well as the pope's coats of arms "in the corner of the world" and "over against Paradise" (Yule 1866b:344; Lat. *Kronika Marignolova*:496).<sup>18</sup> This "corner of the world" is believed to be the southernmost tip of India, Kanyakumari. According to his further description, paradise is located 40 Italian miles off the coast of Ceylon, "opposite a glorious mountain," i.e. opposite Adam's Peak (2,243 m). He claims that according to the locals one can hear the sound of falling water coming from paradise (Yule 1866b:346; Lat. *Kronika Marignolova*:497). Marignola's paradise is surrounded by the ocean and located beyond "Columbine India" as the most elevated place on earth, touching the Moon's sphere:

Now that fountain cometh down from the mount and falleth into a lake, which is called by the philosophers Euphirattes. Here it passes under another water which is turbid, and issues forth on the other side, where it divides into four rivers which pass through Seyllan... (Yule 1866b:346; Lat. *Kronika Marignolova*:497)

So far Marignola's description is in line with the notions of paradise common in his time, with the exception of its localization "opposite Ceylon." Drawing on personal experience, the chronicler slightly modified the list of four paradisiacal rivers, stating they were the Nile, the Yellow River, the Tigris and the Euphrates. He listed the Chinese river instead of Ganges or Indus, which were then more commonly identified with the biblical river of Pishon (Delumeau 2000:45), because he had seen the mighty Yellow River with an abundance of gold and silk on its banks with his own eyes (*Kronika Marignolova*:497). Marignola mentions in several other places in his chronicle that he came close to paradise, namely during his description of a Buddhist monastery under Adam's Peak. He describes the mountain as "perhaps after Paradise the highest mountain on the face of the earth" (Yule 1866b:358) and as a place where Adam first descended upon his expulsion from paradise.

<sup>18)</sup> Henry Yule identified this monument with a certain column which was washed away by the sea in 1866 (Yule 1866b:344–345, note 2).

Footprints on a slope of Adam's Peak, a symbol of Buddha in Buddhist arts, Marignola interpreted as Adam's footprints (*Kronika Marignolova*:500), as did the Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta (1304–1368/72) (Ibn Battúta 2005:8). Marignola continues to describe a house that once belonged to Adam, according to local Buddhist monks whom Marignola met there and who believed that this elevated place was spared the Flood — which Marignola dismisses as conflicting with the Scripture (*Kronika Marignolova*:500). The notion that paradise was located on a hill or another elevated place in order to evade the Flood was common to a range of other authors (Delumeau 2000:50–54). This episode is one of the points at which Marignola points out discrepancies between the Scripture and his own experience. Yet, he is satisfied with merely stating these discrepancies, without trying to explain or reconcile them.

While it may appear that Marignola “travelled with the Bible in his hand,” as suggested by Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken (1967:298), his own observations are not without merit as they provide an abundance of detailed information.<sup>19</sup> Marignola used the ground uncovered by the Bible and the teachings of the Church Fathers and filled the gaps with his own findings, including a detailed description, following immediately his chapter on paradise, of the local flora and various fruits, including jackfruit (“inside it has a pulp of surpassing flavor, with the sweetness of honey and of the best Italian melon” [Yule 1866b:363; Lat. *Kronika Marignolova*:501]). After this digression Marignola returns to his main narrative to discuss the diet of Adam and Eve and to conclude that, on their expulsion from paradise, the biblical couple lived on bananas, coconuts, jackfruit and other tropical fruits (*Kronika Marignolova*:501). Marignola reiterates the view that until the Flood people did not eat meat,<sup>20</sup> “nor to this day do those men use it who call themselves the children of Adam” — meaning Buddhist monks, whose life he then depicts with unconcealed interest and amiability (Yule 1866b:367; Lat. *Kronika Marignolova*:502).

<sup>19)</sup> In Marignola's account we can thus find the earliest mention of the existence of the cult of St. George in South India (*Kronika Marignolova*:496) and many other details about the life of the local population.

<sup>20)</sup> The opinion that people before the Flood did not consume flesh is based on *Gn* 9, 1–4, where God gives all the animals to Noah and his sons.

These and similar examples raise the question whether the theme of earthly paradise was in fact in itself a key element of Marignola's narrative. Earthly paradise obviously has its central role in the biblical history of humankind; but its association with a concrete territory in the vicinity of a place visited by Marignola himself provided the author with a convenient pretext for his observations on tropical vegetation and the pious locals, who would be otherwise difficult to "smuggle" into a chronicle of primarily Bohemian history. The author did not cover emerging contradictions; he contrasted his own observations about Asians with traditional European beliefs and did not even shy away from challenging the views of European philosophers and earlier authors, as I will show later in this paper.

If we summarize the different travelers' notions of the earthly paradise "in the East", we will find rather dissimilar approaches. Marignola locates paradise in the vicinity of Ceylon and uses the motif to further his own travel writing within his history work. Jordanus removes paradise to India Tertia, which in his narrative represents an amalgam of traditional *topoi* and which is clearly distinct from the more realistic passages devoted to India Minor (north-western India) and India Major (southern India and countries further to the east). Neither Rubruck and Carpini, who were sent as envoys to Mongolia, nor Odoric and Polo, who focused their attention primarily on China, say anything about paradise. Only Montecorvino, who travelled through a major part of Asia, including both India and China, admits that he enquired about paradise, but with no success (*Sinica Franciscana*:342).

If Marignola was the only one of these travelers to testify to the existence of paradise in the East, what was the treatment of the empire of Prester John, which was believed to adjoin paradise?

### **The Bygone Glory of Prester John's Empire**

In the 12th century, a legend spread across Europe of an empire ruled by a mighty Christian king and priest named John and located somewhere in the East, close to paradise. An important source of the imagery associated with this mythical empire was a letter written in 1170, whose author was believed to be Prester John himself and which was addressed to the Byzantine emperor, Manuel I Komnenos (Zarncke

1879:909–924).<sup>21</sup> The letter described the empire as extraordinarily astonishing, inhabited by strange creatures, fertile and rich in precious stones. The subjects of Prester John allegedly included the Amazons, Brahmans, the ten Lost Tribes of Israel and a range of other remarkable creatures. John was presented as a Christian ruler possessing a combination of secular and spiritual power. The letter astounded European rulers and incited attempts to establish contacts with this emperor; Latin Christians hoped John could help them fight Muslims. The background of the legend's origin is rather complicated,<sup>22</sup> but the character of Prester John was inspired by a real person and the legend itself is associated with Qara-Khitan victory over the Seljūk Sultan Sanjar (Jackson 2005: 20–21).

The legend gained considerable prominence and was quoted by various sources until the 16th century. The mythical empire's localization frequently varied between India, Central Asia and Ethiopia. In the times of the Franciscan and Dominican missions, retrieval of information about this empire and, if possible, establishment of contacts complied with the European power interests of that time. Unlike paradise, whose supposed existence in the East lacked any urgency for European travelers since it was known to be inaccessible to humans, the empire of Prester John was a hot topic. Still, compared with imagery circulating within Europe, travel writing of that time marks a considerable decline in this mythical country's prestige, depriving the mythical empire of its original aura and describing Prester John no longer as the powerful "king of Indians," but as a local prince temporarily ruling a territory somewhere in Central Asia.

Ever since the emergence of the legend, there was one controversy about Prester John's empire, namely the widespread belief that John was a Nestorian. In a brief exposition of his rise, Rubruck writes that John was originally a Naiman Nestorian shepherd, but after the death of the khan the Nestorians there started calling him King John and

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<sup>21</sup>) A partial translation of this letter into English is also included in Delumeau (2000:71–83).

<sup>22</sup>) The work of Zarncke (1897) consists of an edition of a number of important documents. For an overview of the sources see e.g. von den Brincken (1973: 382–412); see also Jackson (1997) and Baum (1999).



“they used to tell of him ten times more than the truth” (Dawson 1955:122; Lat. *Sinica Franciscana*:206).

Nestorians of Central Asia had spread impressive reports of King John, but when Rubruck was travelling through what was believed to be John’s country, no one knew anything about Prester John, save for a few Nestorians. Rubruck reports that this John had a brother named Unc, who lived three weeks from John in the town of Karakorum; Unc had abandoned Christianity to become an idolater and supported likeminded priests (*Sinica Franciscana*:206–207). Rubruck locates Prester John’s territory to the southern foothills of the Tarbagatai mountain ridge, the place of Güyük Khan’s encampment (Jackson 1990:122, note 6).

Montecorvino also placed Prester John’s empire in Central Asia. In one of his epistles Montecorvino reports that he converted a Nestorian king named George, one of Prester John’s descendents, to Catholicism (*Sinica Franciscana*:348) but makes no mention of the empire’s legendary riches and power.

Carpini only mentions Prester John in his description of the rise to power of the Mongol empire: Genghis Khan is said to have sent an army to India Major, but its ruler, King John, faced the khan’s army and dispersed it (*Sinica Franciscana*:59). Carpini does not say whether John was a Nestorian or not and makes no mention of John’s riches nor of visiting his empire himself.

Drawing on his own travel experience, Odoric makes comments similarly skeptical to those made by Rubruck:

I arrived at the country of Prester John but as regards him not one hundredth part is true of what is told of him as if it were undeniable. His principal city is called Tozan, and chief city though it is, Vicenza would be reckoned its superior. He has, however, many other cities under him, and by a standing compact always receives as wife the Great Khan’s daughter. (Yule 1866a:146–147; Lat. *Sinica Franciscana*:483)

Close ties between the khan and Prester John are also mentioned by Polo, who states that John’s empire used to be so powerful that the Mongols themselves paid him tribute, but later they rebelled against him and freed themselves from his rule by crossing a desert and heading north (*The Travels* I:226–227). When Genghis Khan became the

ruler of the Mongols, Polo continues, he asked Prester John for permission to marry his daughter, which John refused; in a subsequent battle Prester John was defeated and his descendents now rule his country under the Mongols' control (*The Travels* I:244–245).

In Jordanus's account, Prester John's empire is, similarly to paradise, made part of the mythical India Tertia, while John is described as the king of Ethiopia (*Mirabilia Descripta*:134). Marignola too places John's empire in Ethiopia without providing any further details (*Kronika Marignolova*:497).

In these travelogues, the original legend of a powerful empire underwent a major transformation. Without questioning the country's existence as such, the authors remained immune to its earlier fabulous descriptions and saw it as devoid of its supposed splendor, either because it had already vanished or had always been a mere legend. King John only preserves his majesty in Jordanus's *Mirabilia*, in a section devoted to India Tertia; Marignola mentions John's empire without further details. None of the travelers make a single mention of Prester John's empire being located anywhere near the heavenly paradise.

Delumeau points out that the restraint adopted by these travelers in their accounts of Prester John's mythical land still did not prevent a further dissemination of the legend in the European literature (Delumeau 2000:84–86). The way the missionaries treated the motif of Prester John's empire was rather characteristic, as we will also see later: While never questioning the country's existence, they never gave up their intentions to describe everything the way they had seen it with their own eyes.

### **Human Monsters — Real or Mythical?**

If these travelogues transformed the original image of a powerful empire to that of a province controlled by the khan of Mongolia, what then happened to the monsters listed among Prester John's alleged subjects? (Zarncke 1879:911) The idea that the East was home to various human monsters dates back to classical antiquity; medieval authors picked up the thread and their accounts also were reflected in the fine

arts.<sup>23</sup> These peculiar humanlike creatures of the East were believed to include Skiapods, Blemmyae, Pygmies, Dog-heads, Panotti and others. More comprehensive lists can be found especially in the works of Ctesias of Knidos (5th/4th century BCE) or Megasthenes (4th century BCE), frequently quoted by Strabo and Arrian.<sup>24</sup> In medieval Europe monsters mainly inhabited the pages of encyclopedic works, such as the *Etymologiae* by Isidore of Seville, *De Universo* by Rabanus Maurus or *Liber de Natura Rerum* by Thomas of Cantimpré. Monsters also appeared in epics, most notably about Alexander the Great, about the travels of Ernest the Brave, margrave of Austria,<sup>25</sup> or about the adventures of Henry the Lion, duke of Saxony (cf. Ott 1998). These accounts raised a range of questions, primarily concerning the extent to which these monsters could be considered human, whether they were eligible for salvation and what was the cause of their disfigurement.<sup>26</sup> An emerging issue within the medieval discourse on human monsters was the nature of their otherness in relation to people as well as their position in the world order.

Medieval travelogues did not avoid the monster theme, but instead of exploring the theological implications of their supposed existence they strove to either verify their authenticity or explain the origin of the monster tales. The travelers' findings were again less fascinating than the European accounts of monsters that were not based on direct experience.

When enquiring about monster tribes, Rubruck was told that none had ever been seen. His subsequent comment, that this “makes me wonder very much if there is any truth in the story” (Dawson 1955: 170; Lat. *Sinica Franciscana*:269),<sup>27</sup> is ambiguous and could either mean that Rubruck found the information hard to believe, or that he

<sup>23</sup>) One of the best known architectural depictions of monsters can be found in the narthex of the church of St. Mary Magdalene in Vézelay (around 1130).

<sup>24</sup>) Regarding Megasthenes and his work see Karttunen (1997:70–76).

<sup>25</sup>) *Herzog Ernst* is a German epic from the end of the 12th century.

<sup>26</sup>) On this issue see Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XVI,8.

<sup>27</sup>) “*Quesivi de monstribus sive de monstruosis hominibus de quibus narrat Ysidorus et Solinus. Ipsi dicebant michi quod nunquam viderant talia, de quo multum miramur si verum sit.*”

had always doubted the monsters' existence anyway (Jackson 1990: 201, note 5).

While Rubruck paid little attention to human monsters, Carpini discussed the issue in his chapter on the history of the Mongol expansion to the territories of neighboring nations. He does not comment on the monsters' authenticity, but merely states that he heard about them from locals (*Sinica Franciscana*:74),<sup>28</sup> who told him that during an expansion to the north Mongols met Dog-heads, Parossits, as well as with people with oxen's hooves and dogs' faces and Skiapods (*Sinica Franciscana*:60, 73–75).

While we can find all these tribes of human monsters, including Dog-heads, listed in Pliny the Elder's encyclopedia, it would be too simple to regard Carpini's monster passages as mere derivatives of older European sources. A comparison of Carpini's account with Benedict's *Hystoria Tartarorum* reveals some surprising elements, which support Carpini's claim that he based his description of monsters on Mongolian sources rather than on the traditional European imagery. *Hystoria Tartarorum* describes the same monster tribes as Carpini's travelogue; besides Parossits both accounts mention a tribe of creatures with oxen hooves and dog's faces. Carpini calls them with the Mongol name *u<co>rcolon*, adding that this translates into Latin as *bovis pedes* ("ox's feet"), which Denis Sinor has described as a faithful rendition of the Mongolian expression (Sinor 1970). *Hystoria Tartarorum* calls these creatures *nochoyterim*, which is in turn an equivalent of *cynocephalus* ("dog's head") (*Hystoria Tartarorum*:16).

Klaus Karttunen has demonstrated through a comparison of ancient Greek and Indian sources that images of mythical beings with similar features are not restricted to a single cultural environment (1989, 1997). Hence it cannot be ruled out that the aforementioned passages on monsters by Carpini and Benedict drew on both the European and the Asian mythology.

Dog-heads, humanlike beings with dogs' heads or faces, were among the most frequently mentioned monster tribes; their alleged locations included various parts of Asia from the continent's northern corners

<sup>28</sup>) "...ubi invenerunt quedam monstra, ut nobis firmiter dicebatur... quedam etiam monstra, ut nobis dicebatur pro certo, ... invenerunt..."

down to the Nicobar Islands. In a chapter about this archipelago in the Indian Ocean, Odoric writes that local men and women have dogs' faces, worship an ox as their god, are brave warriors but eat their captives; their ruler is just and travelling in his country is safe (*Sinica Franciscana*:452–453). Polo locates a tribe of Dog-heads to the neighboring Andaman Islands and describes them as cruel cannibals, whose women are beautiful, but men have the faces of dogs (*The Travels II*: 309–310, note 1).

These two narratives about people with dogs' faces in the area of the Nicobar and Andaman Islands are not isolated, as similar accounts are given by other travelers, including Ibn Battuta (Ibn Battúta 2005:272).<sup>29</sup> Dog-heads are the only monster tribe described by Jordanus, who locates them in India Tertia, as he does systematically with all other mythical elements (*Mirabilia Descripta*:137).

Odoric also met Pygmies in China: "These pygmies, both male and female, are famous for their small size. But they have rational souls like ourselves." (Yule 1866a:122; Lat. *Sinica Franciscana*:468–469).

Jordanus too mentions a small people living in Java, but does not label them as monsters; he says they are as small as three- or four-year-old children, all covered with fur and living on wooded hills; they are not many (*Mirabilia Descripta*:126). The interesting thing about these two quotations is that the authors classify Pygmies as *people*, not *monsters*, by which they completely dismiss earlier theological debates over their origin and nature.

Marignola gives more space to human monsters and their significance. Similarly to his treatment of paradise, he tries to address the discrepancy between traditional legends and his own experience. In his chronicle Marignola reports about physically deformed individuals (although he encounters these in Europe rather than in Asia)<sup>30</sup> and

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *The Travels II*:311–312, note 1. According to some travelers this motif occurs also in the local mythology. According to a local narrative, the first inhabitants of the Nicobar Islands resulted from the marriage between a man and a female dog, or between a dog and a woman (Kloss 1903:229).

<sup>30</sup> Marignola mentions a girl with fur all over her body, who came from Tuscany, and a child from the same region which was born with two heads and lived for seven days (*Kronika Marignolova*:508). He also mentions meeting a hermaphrodite (*Kronika Marignolova*:510).

interprets their disfigurement as a manifestation of God's will, meant to warn people and make them fearful and grateful that they themselves are not similarly deformed (*Kronika Marignolova*:509).

Marignola says that, although he travelled through a significant portion of the world and enquired about monster tribes, he could not find any evidence of their existence; he himself believes they do not exist (*Kronika Marignolova*:509). In subsequent passages Marignola describes, with the passion of an ethnographer, peculiar nations he met, but classifies them as people rather than monsters. He reports meeting a giant in India, who was so tall Marignola only reached to the waist of the giant's ugly, stinking figure. These giants reportedly live hidden in forests, walk around naked and are difficult to spot; they produce various things and grow grains and many other crops, which they sell by placing them on the road and hiding nearby before traders' arrival; traders then take the goods away and leave the corresponding sum on the road (*Kronika Marignolova*:509).<sup>31</sup>

Marignola never applies the term "monster" to tribes or nations he met in person, but only to physically deformed individuals (whose deformation he interprets as God's warning or as an ominous sign) and to strange animals (*Kronika Marignolova*:510). He expresses doubts about the existence of monster tribes previously described in the European literature and attempts to explain the origin of these myths through rational constructions. Rather remarkable is his explanation of the myth of Skiapods, who were widely believed to use their single large foot to protect themselves from sunburn while lying on their backs. Marignola argues that this was a tale made up by poets and inspired by a habit among Indians to carry parasols — similar to one Marignola himself had at home in Florence (*Kronika Marignolova*:509). The Italian traveler concludes that mythical monsters do not exist and that their images in European literature have to be understood as myths born out of a peculiar interpretation of reality.

Montecorvino showed less effort to come up with improvised explanations of mythical motifs associated with the East. In one of his letters he merely notes with a hint of despair:

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<sup>31</sup>) Similar practices in conducting trade have been recorded also in recent times (Reichert 1992:42, note 185).

As regards men of a marvellous kind, to wit, men of a different make from the rest of us, and as regards animals of like description, and as regards the Terrestrial Paradise, much have I asked and sought, but nothing have I been able to discover. (Yule 1866a:213; Lat. *Sinica Franciscana*:342)

The examples above suggest that European travelers to Asia in the 13th and 14th century had an ambition to confirm or refute the authenticity of traditional images of human monsters. In doing so, they used their own observations of reality to rectify or explain many mythical motifs. Aboriginal tribes that the travelers encountered in person are never described as monsters, but rather as people of different appearance. “Real” monsters were thus restricted to the sphere of legends — not only the European ones, but also local tales, as is evident from the use of Mongolian names for monsters described by Mongols to the author of *Hystoria Tartarorum*.

### **Traditional Imagery vs. Empirical Knowledge — a Medieval, or Modern Conflict?**

Several conclusions can be drawn based on the examples above. The European medieval travelogues to some extent reflect traditional imagery of the East and attempt to find answers to questions regarding the nature of legendary phenomena. That, however, does not mean that these authors were unable to also perceive reality around them and supplement or rectify earlier knowledge. Rubruck did not hesitate to dispute Isidore’s earlier claim that the Caspian Sea is a sea gulf by pointing out that it is rather a sea or a large lake and that it is possible to travel all around it in four months (*Sinica Franciscana*:211). Marignola similarly did not shy away from rectifying earlier erroneous beliefs, whether they were related to the world’s geography or to the way in which pepper was grown.<sup>32</sup>

The proportion of mythical elements and realistic description obviously differs between individual authors, partly depending on the

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<sup>32)</sup> He reported that he crossed a desert, which had previously been considered impassable (*Kronika Marignolova*:495). It was commonly believed that pepper turned black as a result of burning, but Marignola pointed out that the dark color resulted from drying in the sunshine (*Kronika Marignolova*:496).

purpose with which the reports were compiled. Carpini's and Rubruck's works reflect their effort to conscientiously and systematically describe Mongols and assess their power ambitions as well as the degree of threat they posed for Europe. Carpini devotes long passages to the Mongols' positive and negative characteristics in connection with the khan's frequent power claims over Europe, which were at that time viewed as a threat to Christendom. He gives a detailed description of the methods of Mongolian warfare and proposes ways Europeans could best resist this enemy on the battlefield. Carpini explains his effort to deliver accurate and true information by the following quotation from the Bible (*Prov* 1:5): "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels."<sup>33</sup> In this Foucaultian observation Carpini points out that he strives for maximum accuracy since accurate knowledge is the basis of power (cf. Rachewiltz 1971:105).

Rubruck, whose account is a true *itinerarium* of countries he visited and nations and customs he encountered there, pays less attention to Mongols' warfare than to their everyday life as well as to their neighboring nations. Yet even he comments on Christianity's chances in a potential military conflict (*Sinica Franciscana*:331). It is obvious that both authors treated their simultaneous assignment in diplomacy and espionage with much responsibility.

Odoric, free of the urgent political and military objectives of his two predecessors, did not write his report to identify an enemy and his weaknesses, but to simply enlighten the reader on issues that Odoric found extraordinary and noteworthy: "Albeit many other stories of sundry kinds concerning the customs and peculiarities of different parts of this world have been related by a variety of persons, . . . , I, Friar Odoric of Friuli, can truly rehearse many great marvels which I did hear and see" (Yule 1866a:43; Lat. *Sinica Franciscana*:413).

Marignola justified his travel writing digressions from the central historical theme by a need to liven up the serious subject matter with entertaining yet beneficial stories (*Kronika Marignolova*:499). It is in

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<sup>33</sup>) "...credimus enim quod [non]nulla meliora et utiliora cogitabunt et facient illi qui ad hoc prudentes sunt et instructi, poterunt attamen per illa que superius dicta sunt, habere de eis occasionem et materiam cogitandi; scriptum est enim: audiens [sapiens] sapientior erit et intelligens gubernacula possidebit." (*Sinica Franciscana*:101).



his chronicle that we can best observe the remarkable dialogue between traditional imagery and personal experience, which leads the author from reflections on the legendary to the description of the real. Marignola intersperses his presentation of biblical history with stories and episodes that demonstrate his observational skills as well as his interest in the countries he visited. He contrasts information related to him by locals with the wording of the Scripture and points out discrepancies where appropriate, without ruling out one or the other version (*Kronika Marignolova*:500). While interweaving and comparing traditional imagery with his own observations, Marignola consistently differentiated between the two by always either crediting his source<sup>34</sup> or by stating that a piece of knowledge was based on his own experience.

All these accounts also display an effort to rationally explain legendary elements; subjected to the travelers' detailed scrutiny, legendary images are gradually being displaced by a somewhat less fantastic reality. That is especially the case of the empire of Prester John, which preserved its name but lost its luster in these accounts. Similarly, Marignola's presentation of human monsters replaces their alleged monstrosity with mere difference.

An original solution of the discrepancies between traditional imagery and personal experience is offered by Jordanus. He is primarily interested in that which is unusual, but his interest ebbs once the unusual crosses the limits of believability (*Mirabilia Descripta*:108).<sup>35</sup> In Greece he found almost nothing worth recording (*Mirabilia Descripta*:104); the further east he travels, the more detailed his presentation. Still, this does not mean he moved to the sphere of fantasy; on the contrary, he was the first European to record a number of interesting factual details.<sup>36</sup> While neither Scripture nor the Church authorities feature explicitly in his travelogue, Jordanus shows a strong desire to come to terms with the legendary *topoi* traditionally located in the East. Although the reality he witnessed was in itself so astonishing that

<sup>34</sup>) Apart from Scripture, Marignola often refers also to Augustine's *De civitate Dei*.

<sup>35</sup>) "*Alia autem narratione ad mirabili in hac Maiori Armenia minime vidi.*" (*Mirabilia Descripta*:108).

<sup>36</sup>) These concern especially passages describing Buddhist monasteries in the Mongolian region (*Mirabilia Descripta*:138) and Parsi funeral rites (*Mirabilia Descripta*:118).

it could have been the sole subject of his account, he did not leave out mythical motifs, but instead he locates them in India Tertia. Jordanus emphasizes that he did not visit the region himself, but heard about it from trustworthy persons (*Mirabilia Descripta*:134).<sup>37</sup> Hence he located legendary motifs in a designated geographical space to distinguish them from descriptions based on his own experience.

An example of this strategy, adopted not only by Jordanus, is the French Dominican's treatment of the unicorn. He first mentions the mythic animal in a chapter on India Minor, where he lists the region's rich fauna and adds: "There is also another animal, which is called *Rhinoceros*, as big as a horse, having one horn long and twisted, but it is not the *unicorn*." (Catalani 2005:18; Lat. *Mirabilia Descripta*:116).<sup>38</sup> Real unicorns live in Jordanus's mythical India Tertia, along with dragons and rukh birds: "In this India are the true unicorns, like a great horse, having only one horn in the forehead, very thick and sharp, but short, and quite solid, marrow and all." (Catalani 2005:42; Lat. *Mirabilia Descripta*:134).<sup>39</sup>

This is a truly artful solution to the discrepancies between traditional imagery and the author's personal experience. Jordanus did not fail to realistically describe what he himself witnessed (a rhino is not a unicorn), but at the same did not disappoint his readers by depriving them of some famous *topoi* they may have expected. The author thus avoided the same unpleasant situation in which Polo found himself due to his strong sense of realism. Unlike Jordanus, the Venetian traveler disregarded the reader's traditional dreamlike imagery and instead presented things the way they were: Unicorns live in Sumatra, have bison's coat, elephants' legs and a thick black horn in the middle of the forehead; their weapon is not their horn, but their thorn-covered tongue; their head resembles that of a wild boar and they always carry it low to the ground; they like lazing in mud (*The Travels II*:285). No

<sup>37</sup> "De Tertia Yndia dicam, quod non vidi eo, quod ibi non fui, verum a fide dignis audiui mirabilia multa..." (*Mirabilia Descripta*:134).

<sup>38</sup> "Est etiam aliud animal, quod vocatur rinocerunta, magnum ad modum equi, unum cornu habens in capite longum et tortuosum; non tamen est unicornis." (*Mirabilia Descripta*:116).

<sup>39</sup> "In ista Yndia sunt unicornes veri, magni ad modum equi, cornu habentes in fronte unum tantum grossissimum et acutum, sed breve, totum solidum, etiam et (an sine?) medulla." (*Mirabilia Descripta*:134).

wonder that Polo's travelogue, sometimes called *The Million*, was believed to contain a million lies — as every child knows that *that* is not what the unicorn looks like.

Umberto Eco uses this example of the unicorn to demonstrate the medieval understanding of realism: the concept remains, but its content is completely transformed (Eco 1998). In the same way John Prester's empire becomes a Mongol province and human monsters become people of different appearance.

In view of these conclusions it seems appropriate to ask whether the concepts of *personal experience* and *traditional imagery* are the most suitable for grasping and deciphering the message of the medieval travelers. I believe that the strategies the missionaries adopted to describe a previously unknown reality can be very usefully expounded from a different angle. The sociologist Karlheinz Ohle has proposed that there are two types of the Other, namely the "normative Other" and the "cognitive Other." Normative is that Other which is being directly experienced; its familiarization depends on the observer's subjective predispositions; the discovery and recognition of this type of the Other is followed by a systematic description of the previously unknown parts of the world with the help of structures familiar to the observer. Cognitive is then that Other which we do not familiarize through direct perception, but the existence of which we are aware of or which we assume (Ohle 1978; cf. Jandasek 1993).

In line with this theory, the process of reconsidering traditional wisdom when faced with reality, as we have witnessed it in the European medieval travel writing, could be understood as a shift in perception from a cognitive Other, previously unavailable to direct experience, to a normative Other, with which the observer is in a direct contact and which he or she tries to apprehend. In this way *otherness* is gradually transformed into *difference*, which can be apprehended and described relative to the world the observer already knows. In this way, the traveler to an unknown land can fittingly enlighten the reader even on completely new, unheard-of phenomena. A telling example is Odoric's description of a sand desert which is compared to a sea:

Now that sea is a wondrous thing, and right perilous. And there were none of us who desired to enter on that sea. For it is all of dry sand without the slightest moisture. And it shifteth as the sea doth when in storm, now hither, now thither,

and as it shifeth it maketh waves in like manner as the sea doth; so that countless people travelling thereon have been overwhelmed and drowned and buried in those sands. For when blown about and buffeted by the winds, they are raised into hills, now in this place, now in that, according as the wind chanceth to blow. (Yule 1866a:52; Lat. *Sinica Franciscana*:419)

A major difference between a cognitive Other and a normative Other is that a normative Other can be studied, especially through comparison with familiar phenomena and through identification of differences, a process that often surprised the missionaries as much as the inhabitants of Asia. Such a surprising encounter with a normative Other then allows the observer to realize that what he or she has regarded as a set of universal habits or views is in fact a cultural construct that is as unobvious to the Other as the Other's habits and views are to the observer. A typical example of this is Rubruck's first audience at Möngke Khan: In an effort to represent European monkhood in its best light, the Flemish emissary shaved his beard; as a result, local Nestorians at first mistook him for a *tuin*, a Buddhist monk (*Sinica Franciscana*:248).<sup>40</sup> Such situations then serve to challenge what would otherwise seem as an obviousness and universality of the meanings of symbols commonly used in "our" world.

### Which Tradition? Whose Empirical Knowledge?

These unexpected misunderstandings, combined with responses to local legends as rendered for example by the *Hystoria Tartarorum*, point to yet another, so far little discussed issue: In the context of the theory of Orientalism, the East is an object of "orientalization", i.e. of western imagery and interpretation. Yet to regard the East as a mere object would be somewhat oversimplified. The inhabitants of medieval Asia were not merely idle objects of European scrutiny and interpretation; rather, their narrations and behavior largely shaped the European accounts of the East. When studying the general role of travelers' accounts of medieval Asia and their various sources (traditional myths,

<sup>40</sup> "Et hoc querebant quia feceramus barbas nostras radi, de consilio ductoris nostri, ut apparemus coram Chan secundum morem patrie nostre. Unde ipsi credebant quod essemus tuini, hoc est ydolatre." (*Sinica Franciscana*:248).

direct observation, etc.), we should not forget about the part played by locals on whose accounts the European travelers often relied and which they further interpreted. The travelers' traditional imagery may even have intermingled with locals' narrations potentially containing local mythical motifs (cf. Rachewiltz 1971:22–23). This makes the study of medieval missionaries' travel writing even more complex and new factors enter the relationship between traditional imagery and personal experience.

First of all, this raises the question of the extent to which the missionaries and locals were able to understand each other (cf. Richard 1977). Latin travelogues, including but not limited to the *Hystoria Tartarorum*, adopted a number of words from oriental languages, if often in a more or less garbled form.<sup>41</sup> The linguistic and communicational aspects of these encounters would deserve a separate study. Right now it will suffice to say that a number of explicit comments made by the medieval authors reveal a lot about the communication with natives. The most detailed notes on this issue come from Rubruck, who in his text often complains about his interpreters' incompetence, which he blames on their considerable predilection for alcohol (*Sinica Franciscana*:191, 196, 240, 251, 255 etc.).

At the same time we cannot ignore another aspect of the mutual interaction between the missionaries and the locals, which is humor. As Karttunen pointed out when discussing Megasthenes' report on India, it is possible that the locals may have made up some of the most fantastic stories and related them to the travelers just for the travelers' or their own amusement (Karttunen 1997:80). (This after all happens from time to time even to today's anthropologists.) We will probably never be able to tell with certainty when the locals were just joking, but the awareness of the potential influence of humor may at least spare the scholar some sleepless nights he or she may otherwise spend trying to interpret some fantastic motifs.

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<sup>41</sup>) One such attempt at recording a local word is the use of the term *tuin*, designating Buddhists, which is in fact an accurate transcription of the Turkish word *toyin*, which is in turn a loan word from Chinese *daoren* — “man of the way.” Cf. Clauson (1972:569). For this information I am indebted to Prof. Samuel N. C. Lieu.

These examples demonstrate that the Other did play a certain active role, often ignored by contemporary scholars, in the perception and interpretation of the East.

Last but not least, the study of the medieval accounts of Asia is often affected by contemporary scholars' expectations and ideas about all the things that the medieval traveler should have recorded. However, we have to realize that the travelers themselves did in no way pretend that their accounts were complete or perfect. Carpini, whose account displays a refined sense for systematic and exhaustive description, admits at several points that he does not know further details (*Sinica Franciscana*:66, 67), or that he is incapable of describing certain phenomena: "To conclude briefly about this country: it is large, but otherwise as we saw with our own eyes, for during five and a half months we travelled about it, it is more wretched than I can possibly say." (Dawson 1955:6; Lat. *Sinica Franciscana*:32). He also admitted a lack of suitable vocabulary for the description of previously unknown phenomena in a passage on the Mongolian clothing: "The caps they have are different from those of other nations, but I am unable to describe what they are like in such a way as you would understand" (Dawson 1955:8; Lat. *Sinica Franciscana*:35).

Odoric frequently points out that he is leaving out many facts from his narration, as if his report was only an outline of sorts for a later, more detailed account, the execution of which was prevented by the author's death. He has several ways to explain the reasons for and nature of these omissions. The most prosaic explanation is that to describe everything he saw would simply take too much time (*Sinica Franciscana*:445)<sup>42</sup> and would still be only a partial representation of the whole reality. A more serious reason for brevity was Odoric's disapproval of some local habits, which seemed to him better not to describe (*Sinica Franciscana*:441, 444). (Fortunately for us, he often did not abide by this resolve.) The author also admits omitting many good and useful details (*Sinica Franciscana*:447, 455 etc.). Towards the end of his account Odoric says he kept some phenomena for himself simply because they were too unbelievable (*Sinica Franciscana*:494).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> "Et sic de aliis que in ista insula reperiuntur, que etiam nimis longum esset scribere." (*Sinica Franciscana*:445).

<sup>43</sup> "Multa etiam alia ego dimisi que scribi non feci, cum ipsa quasi incredibilia apud aliquos viderentur, nisi illa propriis oculis perspexissent." (*Sinica Franciscana*:494).

Despite making the peculiar and even the unbelievable the main subject of his account, Jordanus often admits something is so amazing that he cannot describe it (*Mirabilia Descripta*:14, 118, 120, 130 etc.). Marignola too complains about a lack of words to express all the “glory of the world” that he saw at the imperial court in Kambalyk (today’s Beijing) (*Kronika Marignolova*:496). His other comments only hint at all the other things he could have described had he been writing a travelogue rather than a chronicle of Bohemian history.

That the medieval missionaries did not record some phenomena which seem completely impossible to overlook to today’s scholar does not necessarily undermine the authenticity of their accounts. This is especially true for the missing mention of the Great Wall of China in *The Travels of Marco Polo* (Wood 1995)<sup>44</sup> or for Odoric’s frequently discussed failure to record the Chinese custom of binding females’ feet. These and other omissions are certainly a valid subject for contemporary research. Yet the scholar should beware of making the methodological mistake of comparing his or her own ideas about what is worth recording with what the medieval author actually did record. Doing so would mean the researcher is incorrectly applying present criteria to texts that are in this case hundreds of years old.

People today can hardly imagine the situation of the medieval Franciscan and Dominican missionaries, who were entering a space that was virtually unexplored by Europeans and yet filled with products of human imagination. Despite this difficulty, the authors resisted the influence of traditional legends and images and faithfully described the reality that to them was often no less unbelievable and astonishing than the initial expectations.

I believe that the process of familiarizing Asia that we can see unfold in the reports of medieval missionaries should not be seen as some competition between direct experience and traditional legends, but rather as a significant shift from contemplations of an *unknown Other* towards the study and description of a *difference*. This shift above all required the authors’ ability to reconsider their original expectations and to perceive reality in new and fresh ways, largely independent of the traditional imagery. The medieval travelers showed their

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<sup>44</sup>) Wood’s opinion that Polo actually did not visit China was refuted by Rachewiltz (1997).

willingness to revise the content of traditional concepts, such as that of Prester John's empire, while also pointing out that beyond the borders of the then known world there was still a lot newness to discover and describe. Hence Odoric's attempt to win the readers' trust by the following comment from the beginning of his report:

Nor, indeed, could I myself have believed these things, had I not heard them with my own ears or seen the like myself. (Yule 1866a:43)

Precisely this ability to be astonished by reality and open to its perception is the first major step in the process of studying the Other. The effort, physical as well as intellectual, that medieval emissaries to Asia exerted to meet this objective, is without doubt worthy of our admiration as well as further scholarly interest.

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## Participation and Giving Ultimate Meaning: Exploring the Entanglement of Psychology of Religion and Phenomenology of Religion in the Netherlands

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### Abstract

Psychology of religion in the Netherlands is rediscovering its historic entanglement with phenomenology of religion in the context of a current transition emancipating itself from the theological objective of re-establishing the relation between theology and faith practice (from the 1960s onwards), and developing into a discipline focusing on “lived religion” and interculturality in closer cooperation with religious studies. In this article the entanglement of psychology of religion and phenomenology of religion is explored starting with the writings of Gerardus van der Leeuw, his interest in a psychological method in phenomenology and his reception of Lévy-Bruhl’s concept of mystic participation. It is argued that psychology of religion in the Netherlands after the Second World War emerged out of the critique by Fokke Sierksma of the phenomenological method in the context of emancipating the science of religion (*godsdienswetenschap*) from theology, and the reaction this provoked in the work of Han Fortmann, who defended Lévy-Bruhl and Van der Leeuw in order to “save” religiosity in a modern secularized world. This theological objective further colored developments in psychology of religion, notably the current discussion on “giving ultimate meaning” (*zingeving*). In the light of an expected closer cooperation between psychology of religion and religious studies, a critical reflection on the often unreflected theological positions and objectives in discussions on “giving ultimate meaning” is pleaded for.

### Keywords

Van der Leeuw, mystic participation, Sierksma, projection, giving ultimate meaning

## Introduction

In recent studies on the emergence of psychology of religion in the Netherlands the importance of Gerardus van der Leeuw's phenomenology of religion has been rediscovered (Vandermeersch & Westerink 2007:230–240; Van Belzen 2007:146–150; Westerink 2009:ch. 3). In fact it can be stated that psychology of religion in the Netherlands is firmly rooted in a phenomenological tradition. This has not always been recognized. In general we can say that psychology of religion developed into a discipline closely associated with practical theology or mental care, and thus that psychologists of religion focused their attention on issues such as healthy vs. unhealthy religion or — currently a dominant issue — “giving ultimate meaning” (*zingeving*). The interaction with religious studies was somewhat neglected in this respect, despite a shared history and the fact that psychology of religion is always dependent on religious studies for its definition of religion. From the perspective of religious studies Van der Leeuw's interest in psychology has not always been judged on its merits. It has been argued that Van der Leeuw showed little interest in the humanities and in fact contributed to a degree of stagnation in the further development of phenomenology of religion and science of religion (*godsdienswetenschap*). Even stronger, his phenomenological approach was supposedly the finishing point of an intellectual movement that eventually proved to be a dead end (Hak 1994). In this article I will argue that Van der Leeuw's phenomenology and his interest in psychology was certainly not a dead end, but in fact the starting point of the emergence of psychology of religion in the Netherlands after the Second World War. Though the influence of scholars like Ludwig Binswanger, Karl Jaspers, Eduard Spranger and especially Lucien Lévy-Bruhl has been noticed (Hofstee 1997:186ff., 207–237), his phenomenological method of empathic understanding and his objective of a “broadening of the ego” in order to ultimately understand coherence or totality of meaning, in relation to the emergence of psychology of religion in the Netherlands, has hardly been elaborated upon.

In this article I will give a concise outline of Van der Leeuw's “psychology” focusing on the influence of Lévy-Bruhl. I will argue that Van der Leeuw's reading of Lévy-Bruhl is not only indispensable for understanding his phenomenology of religion, but more importantly,

I will show that Lévy-Bruhl's concepts of primitive mentality and mystic participation through the writings of Van der Leeuw had a lasting effect on the emergence of and further developments in psychology of religion in the Netherlands. It is my hypothesis that in the current debate on "giving ultimate meaning" (*zingeving*) the underlying conception of religion is still basically inspired by Lévy-Bruhl and Van der Leeuw, although this is often not recognized or made explicit. The dominant theories that regard *zingeving* as a general human function that is seemingly neutral towards religion or faith implicitly hold a specific definition of religion.

### **Van der Leeuw, Psychology and Lévy-Bruhl**

When and exactly how Van der Leeuw's interest in psychology first developed is hard to determine, but it must have been early in his career. In his oration at the start of his professorship in the history of religions at the theological faculty in Groningen he stated that all religions "originate from the same functioning of the human mind" and that they can be studied as "a psychological unity" (Van der Leeuw 1918:5). It would be the task of the phenomenologist to understand this unity by means of a compatible method. Although at first sight Van der Leeuw's phenomenology seems to be an application of Eduard Husserl's phenomenological method on religion, it has been convincingly argued that the influence of Husserl was limited (James 1995; Molendijk 2005:41ff.). In fact, Van der Leeuw's phenomenology stands in a Dutch tradition of phenomenological approaches in the study of the history of religion. The founders of this phenomenological tradition were P. D. Chantepie de la Saussaye and C. P. Tiele. De la Saussaye's successor, and the teacher of Van der Leeuw at the University of Leiden, was William Brede Kristensen. Kristensen, who never wrote a major systematic or methodological study in history of religions or phenomenology, was deeply influenced by Friedrich Schleiermacher to whom he regularly refers. According to Kristensen, a phenomenologist should not just classify objects, but should have a feeling and intuition for religion in order to have a deeper understanding of religious phenomena. Behind this notion lies the idea that reality (or the universe) is a meaningful coherent unity that can be

understood in its totality (Kristensen 1960:1–23, 254–255). Here we find a possible source for Van der Leeuw's interest in psychology. Another source would be the work of the psychiatrist H. C. Rümke, who was a close friend of his since their Gymnasium days, and who would write a dissertation on the phenomenology of the feeling of happiness. He argues that feelings of happiness can transform into religious feelings, which he calls the "highest feelings" as they are related to the experience of being united with the divine. Here feelings of happiness find their ultimate culmination point (Rümke 1923). In a later study on character and unbelief he would argue that unbelief was a developmental disorder (Rümke 1939:7ff.). Normal for *homo religiosus* would be a development of trust in life in which religion plays a natural role: religion was essentially "being a meaningful part of totality," a totality that serves as "ultimate ground" and as a direction in life.

It is highly probable that Van der Leeuw's interest in the psychologies of Ludwig Binswanger and Karl Jaspers was triggered by Rümke (Molendijk 2005:43). Van der Leeuw corresponded with Binswanger from the early 1920s on. They met at the VIIIth International Congress of Psychology held at Groningen in 1926, where Van der Leeuw — who was at first uninvited, but nevertheless present because he wanted to meet Lévy-Bruhl (who eventually couldn't come to the conference) — heard both Binswanger's and Eduard Spranger's lectures on the hermeneutical method in phenomenology and psychology in the writings of Wilhelm Dilthey and Jaspers. Here we find a connection between Kristensen's view on phenomenology and a hermeneutic tradition that starts with Schleiermacher, was deepened by Dilthey and then further developed by Jaspers, Binswanger and Spranger. Dilthey had tried to make a clear distinction between scientific methods in the natural sciences and the hermeneutical method in the human sciences. Whereas in the natural sciences objects could only be studied in their physical appearance, in the human sciences the "living" object could be experienced, expressed and understood in its coherence with other objects.<sup>1</sup> The presupposition was that the human

<sup>1</sup>) "Die Geisteswissenschaften beruhen auf dem Verhältnis von Erlebnis, Ausdruck und Verstehen" (Dilthey 1927:131).

psyche is composed of and structured by permanent capacities such as observing, thinking, wanting and feeling. All people share the same psychic structure (Dilthey 1927:15ff.). This was the *sine qua non* for the subject to be able to understand its object, despite cultural and personal differences.<sup>2</sup> The object could be understood in its manifestations, as far as it expressed itself, because a subject could project himself in the object as it appears, and experience what the other experienced (*Nacherleben*) in a reconstruction of the intentions in the expression. Dilthey's structural psychology was further developed. In his phenomenological approaches Jaspers had argued that psychology should be a psychology of understanding, and he had used the concept empathic understanding (*einfühlend Verstehen*) to indicate the method for understanding an object in its coherence (Jaspers 1959[1913]:253). Binswanger, a colleague of Carl Gustav Jung at the Kreuzlingen sanatorium, notably in his earlier writings tried to develop a phenomenological psychology in the line of Dilthey in which also (elements of) psychoanalysis could be taken up (Binswanger 1922:268). At important moments in Van der Leeuw's writings, when he elaborates on the psychological method in phenomenology, the writings of Jaspers and Binswanger are referred to.<sup>3</sup> Their interpretation of Dilthey's hermeneutics as a method of empathic understanding is a main reason why Van der Leeuw calls his method not only *Nacherleben* but also *Einfühlung* (Van der Leeuw 1926:1–43).<sup>4</sup> At this point, his concept of understanding differs from Spranger's, who is also an important source for Van der Leeuw. Spranger had argued that understanding was an objective understanding of meaningful psychic coherence. This objectivity was possible, because the psychologist could compare individual experiences with his knowledge of general psychic structures (Spranger 1950[1921]:410ff.). Despite the fact that Spranger's ideas on cluster-

<sup>2</sup> "Jede einzelne Lebensäußerung repräsentiert [...] ein Gemeinsames. Jedes Wort, jeder Satz [...] sind nur verständlich, weil eine Gemeinsamkeit den sich in ihnen äussernden mit dem Verstehenden verbindet; der einzelne erlebt, denkt und handelt stets in einer Sphäre von Gemeinsamkeit, und nur in einer solchen versteht er." Dilthey, Wilhelm, "Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften" (Dilthey 1927:146–147).

<sup>3</sup> For example in Van der Leeuw 1933:634ff.

<sup>4</sup> Here Van der Leeuw elaborates on empathic understanding, mainly referring to Binswanger's *Einführung in die Probleme der allgemeinen Psychologie*.



ing phenomena in ideal types are an important element in Van der Leeuw's phenomenology, the possibility of an objective "outside" position of the phenomenologist is denied.<sup>5</sup> The success of the method is bound to the personal qualities of the phenomenologist. Hence, the psychological/phenomenological method is in constant further development growing into a deeper understanding of both object and subject. The latter Van der Leeuw calls "the broadening of the ego" (Van der Leeuw 1926:25–26). This is in itself an aim in phenomenology: the more a subject understands himself or herself, the more the art of understanding can be further developed, which means that in the end even the most difficult phenomena to grasp (for example those in the most "primitive" societies or those related to madness) can be understood. Is there a limit to this empathic understanding? Van der Leeuw speaks of an *epoche*, or final limit, to indicate that the phenomenologist experiences and understands structures of meaning, coherences of meaning, but does not have the pretense to have an ultimate understanding (or judgment) of the reality or the truth.<sup>6</sup> That is beyond his competence; that is an issue for "theoretical and eschatological theology." However sharp this distinction might seem, the broadening of the ego does not only bring about a better understanding of phenomena; it also opens up a subject for a revelation of truth. Beyond the understandable (for the phenomenologist) there is a last "totality of meaning" in which all human understanding is taken up in a being understood by God.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the *epoche* not only functions as an ultimate limit of phenomenological understanding, but also as the point where phenomenology is taken up in theology.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>) See for example Van der Leeuw 1941:11–24.

<sup>6</sup>) "Die 'letzte Grenze' ist nicht bloß in dem von Jaspers gemeinten Sinne nie erreichbar. Sie bedeutet auch die Unerreichbarkeit des Daseins. Die Phänomenologie ist weder Metaphysik noch Erfassung der empirischen Wirklichkeit. Sie beachtet die Zurückhaltung, die Epochè, und ihr Verständnis des Geschehens ist abhängig von seiner 'Einklammerung.' Die Phänomenologie kümmert sich nur um Phänomene, d.h. um das Sich Zeigende; es gibt für sie kein 'Dahinter' des Phänomens" (Van der Leeuw 1933:640).

<sup>7</sup>) In this theological position and conviction we find the deepest source of Van der Leeuw's notion of primitive mentality; see Leertouwer 1991:204.

<sup>8</sup>) In an article Van der Leeuw divides theology into three disciplines, 1. historical theology (biblical sciences, church history and the history of other religions) which

Van der Leeuw's psychological method depended on the premise of a psychic unity, an empathic understanding due to underlying general human psychic structures and ultimately a coherence and totality of meaning. It is in Lévy-Bruhl's studies on primitive mentality and mystic participation that Van der Leeuw found a suitable theoretical framework; understanding this dependence on Lévy-Bruhl is of a crucial importance if we wish to comprehend Van der Leeuw's ideas on phenomenology of religion and theology (Hofstee 1997). Lévy-Bruhl was a French sociologist who, influenced by Herbert Spencer and Émile Durkheim, focused in his work on the general human mental structures that could be found underlying different cultures. In *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (1910), and later in for example *La mentalité primitive* (1922), he presented a theory on the difference between collective representations in primitive and advanced (modern) cultures. The "primitives" did not differentiate between affective, intuitive and cognitive processes and hence their representations and their perceptions and experiences of the world were quite different from those of modern people. He called this "primitive mentality" *prélogique* or *mystique*. Primitive thinking was pre-logical, which meant that in primitive mentality contradictions — for example the conviction that one soul can be in two different places at the same time — were not excluded (Lévy-Bruhl 1922 [1910]:79);<sup>9</sup> and mystical, a concept that should not be taken in a strictly religious sense, but indicated the faith in forces and influences that are invisible and yet perceived to be as real as visible objects (Lévy-Bruhl 1922 [1910]:30; 1947 [1922]:14). This primitive mentality was dependent on and

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mainly uses a comprehensive-explaining methodology, 2. science of religion (phenomenology of religion) which aims at understanding the material found in historical theology, and 3. theoretical or eschatological theology (dogmatics and ethics) "welche die Grenzen sowohl des Erfassbaren wie des Verstehbaren übersteigt und einen letzten Sinnzusammenhang anzudeuten versucht, in dem alles menschliche Verstehen schließlich auf ein Verstandenwerden durch Gott zurückgeführt wird" (Van der Leeuw 1928a:326). Compare: "Es bleibt also ein Rest, der grundsätzlich nicht verstanden werden kann, der aber von der Religion als die Bedingung alles Verstehens angesehen wird. Das Verstehen wird an der Grenze der Erscheinungswelt von einem Verstanden-Werden abgelöst" (Van der Leeuw 1933:440).

<sup>9</sup>) Compare: "prélogique, c'est-à-dire indifférente le plus souvent à la contradiction" (Lévy-Bruhl 1947 [1922]:85).

characterized by a feeling of unity or “continuum” (Lévy-Bruhl 1922 [1910]:109) with the cosmos, a feeling which he designated with the concept of mystic participation. The main characteristic of primitive mentality is thus: “tous impliquent une ‘participation’ entre les êtres ou les objets liés dans une représentation collective.” This is called “la loi de participation, le principe propre de la mentalité ‘primitive’” (Lévy-Bruhl 1922 [1910]:76; cf. also Lévy-Bruhl 1947 [1922]:17–18). The “primitives” thus had their own systematic conception of the world, but without the logic of modern rational thought.

Lévy-Bruhl’s theory was a welcome alternative to the dominant theories, which were evolutionist (Tylor, Frazer) and sought the essence of religion in its origin and historic development. Van der Leeuw devoted several writings to Lévy-Bruhl’s theory.<sup>10</sup> They knew each other personally and stayed in contact throughout the years. The theory of primitive mentality was crucial for Van der Leeuw, because it provided a framework for his ideas on religion, psychological unity and the method of empathic understanding. This is reflected in a definition of religion formulated by Van der Leeuw: religion is “the unity of subject and object, God and human being, the primal identity, that is so often desired for as ultimate identity; the background of all religion is mysticism”.<sup>11</sup> In Van der Leeuw’s interpretation primitive mentality is — more explicitly than in Lévy-Bruhl’s writings — a general anthropological structure for “primitives” as well as for modern people. This slight reconfiguration of the theory of primitive mentality had important consequences. Van der Leeuw argued that especially in religion primitive mentality is still strongly present and here he finds a point to criticize modern secularized society. Modern people have unfortunately lost contact with their primitive nature (as *homo religiosus*) through the modern subject-object dichotomy (Hofstee 1997:233–234). Here we can see (again) how phenomenology transforms into theology.

<sup>10</sup>) Notably Van der Leeuw 1928b and 1937; see also Kippenberg 1997:255–258.

<sup>11</sup>) “De achtergrond van alle religie is de eenheid van subject en object, van God en mens, de oer-identiteit, die tevens vaak als eind-identiteit wordt verlangd. De achtergrond van alle religie is mystiek” (Van der Leeuw 1937:171). Leertouwer has written: “The deepest source of Van der Leeuw’s notion of ‘primitivity’ is, as far as I can see, to be found in theology” (1991:204).

To conclude, the key issues in Van der Leeuw's phenomenology of religion are primitive mentality (as a general mental structure in both "primitive" and modern people); the psychological method of empathic understanding and "broadening of the ego" with the perspective of understanding coherence and totality of meaning; the theological objective of penetrating into the essence of religion in order to overcome the modern subject-object dichotomy.

### **Sierksma, Science of Religion and Projection**

Fokke Sierksma (1917–1977) was one of the most talented of Van der Leeuw's students. In his student years he initially followed in Van der Leeuw's footsteps. It is known that he wrote a thesis on primitive mentality in 1938 (Van Iersel 1991:233), but already in his dissertation, published in 1951 as *Freud, Jung en de religie* [Freud, Jung and religion], Sierksma distanced himself from Van der Leeuw's phenomenological method and his reception of Lévy-Bruhl's thought on mystic participation, and instead turned to Jungian depth psychology. What was the core of his critique of Van der Leeuw, and why a turn to depth psychology?

Sierksma writes in his dissertation that the basic problem with Van der Leeuw's oeuvre is "the problem of the relation between faith and science." In his phenomenology "the old ghost of the *religio naturalis* and hence also of *theologia naturalis* has not yet been exorcized" (Sierksma 1951:196–197). What Sierksma is referring to here is the hermeneutical method that was first developed by Schleiermacher and that was then further elaborated upon by Dilthey, Jaspers, Spranger and Binswanger: the idea that religion can only be understood from within religion (ibid.:13). The phenomenological method of understanding "accepts the risk of subjectivity to 100%". It does not aim at an objective "Schau" of phenomena, but at an understanding through empathic inner contact. This means that the phenomenologist must participate in the religious phenomena. In the aforementioned definition of religion presented by Van der Leeuw it is clear that this participation is ultimately not "scientific," as Sierksma calls it, but "existential" (ibid.:16–17). The fact that Van der Leeuw's phenomenology transgresses into theology is the problem here. The phenomeno-

logical method of understanding through empathic participation and the *adagium* that religion must be understood through religion implies that science of religion will never emancipate itself from theology. And yet, this is what Sierksma not only regards as a clear historical development since the Enlightenment, but also as a desired objective: science of religion should further emancipate itself from theology. Van der Leeuw's phenomenology has thus to be further developed into a science of religion that "resists" theology and that is no longer determined by the old theological "conflict between natural and revealed religion" (ibid.:20). Sierksma sees this as an inevitable development, as part of a cultural process in which God as centre of the universe is replaced by the human being.

The historical development of secularization and the replacement of God by the human being, in itself gives a clear indication for a turn to depth psychology. An emancipated science of religion should not have to fall back on a doctrine on God, but on a doctrine on the human being (ibid.:15), i.e. a psychological theory that can serve as a unifying new foundation for a method of understanding. According to Sierksma, the emergence of psychology shows a similar development as the emergence of a science of religion. It is a history of emancipation, in this case emancipation from philosophy. More importantly, psychology has eventually developed a method that can easily be compared with phenomenology. After a period of psychological reductionism (e.g. in Freudian psychoanalysis) and formalistic experimental methods (e.g. in the work of Karl Girgensohn), Jung had developed a phenomenological approach that tried to describe, order and understand phenomena such as religion without value judgment or confrontation with some sort of theological truth (ibid.:19). Whether this assessment is correct can be doubted, and indeed, Sierksma would soon distance himself from Jung, because of the fact that his doctrine on the collective unconscious and the archetypes is in fact a religious truth, a religious conviction. Ultimately Jung's depth psychology will not be an alternative to theology, and it will thus not serve the emancipation of science of religion. Nevertheless, in his dissertation Jung is understood as compatible with phenomenology and offering a "solution" to the problem of its dependence on theology.

There was more to this turn to depth psychology than finding an alternative foundation for a method of understanding. Hak is right

when he states that the real issue was the question how understanding and explaining were related (Hak 1994:89). Jung's depth psychology opened the way for redefining the relation between understanding and explaining. Concerning this matter, Sierksma devoted a large part of his dissertation to a critique of Jasper's sharp division between a method of understanding and a method of explanation, as well as Spranger's elaborations on that matter (Sierksma 1951:35–89). Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and the archetypes are the irreducible "facts" on which a method of understanding can be built without reducing phenomena to drives (as Freud did). In this way the psychological method of understanding can be made comprehensible within the limits of psychology itself. This method was no longer an intuitive empathic method. Following Jung's "phenomenology" meant that *Verstehen* could be defined as "making conscious" unconscious phenomena. This understanding of phenomena in fact included causal explanation. What Sierksma had called "the fundamental unity of understanding and explaining" in his critique of Jaspers (*ibid.*:59), could be found in Jung's phenomenological depth psychology (*ibid.*:140ff.). Depth psychology's facts and causal explanations thus seemed to provide the phenomenological method with a certain objectivity that was lacking in Van der Leeuw's methodology.

Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and the archetypes, i.e. his ideas on primitivity, also provide an alternative to Lévy-Bruhl's concept of primitive mentality in Van der Leeuw's phenomenology. Primitive mentality is no longer a state of mind that can only be made comprehensible by means of an intuitive empathic method, but can now be envisioned as an objective autonomous psychic structure. The integrative finality of Jungian psychology in what he called the Self can still be described as mystic participation, but instead of returning to Lévy-Bruhl Sierksma was moving in another direction.

Sierksma's movement away from Van der Leeuw was accelerated by the so-called projection debate that started after the publication of Simon Vestdijk's essay *De toekomst der religie* [The future of religion] in 1948 (Vestdijk 1975 [1948]). This essay presented a typology of religiosity that was more than just descriptive. Basically it was a firm critique of what he called the "metaphysical type," in which one could easily recognize a Calvinist believer. Vestdijk argued that this type

should be overcome in a future religion without God that would be a kind of synthesis of Socialism and Buddhism. A key concept in this essay was “projection.” Religion is characterized by the pursuit of “the natural complete human being or natural complete humanity” as ideal.<sup>12</sup> The “metaphysical type” projects this ideal on the transcendent, i.e. he transforms subjective intra-psychic elements into an objectively experienced reality. In this general definition Vestdijk first of all refers to Kant and his reflections on human cognition and subjective perception. Images of reality are created because of certain “emotions, needs and drives, dislike and inclination, dream and reflection, anxiousness and self-interest” (ibid.:66). There are also Jungian elements in Vestdijk’s concept, notably in the idea of projection as a mechanism involved in the pursuit of totality (ibid.:159).

Vestdijk was immediately sharply criticized, amongst others by Van der Leeuw. It was Sierksma who stood up to defend him (Sierksma 1952). He had a clear opinion about the general reaction to Vestdijk: “his scientific hypothesis fell in the hands of persons who did not study religion, but wanted to defend Christianity” (Sierksma 1977 [1956]:162). At this point, the debate on the essay converged with his own attempts to emancipate science of religion. But Vestdijk’s essay was important for a more fundamental reason: he had touched upon a problem in Van der Leeuw’s phenomenology: the psychological motives that underlie a type of religiosity or religion. It could be read as a deconstruction of Van der Leeuw’s ideas on broadening of the ego and growing understanding of the “world.” What was in fact the difference between an intuitive phenomenological method of empathic participation and the psychological mechanism of projection? How could phenomenological self-expression be distinguished from what seems to be its negative, the projection of subjective intra-psychic elements into an experienced phenomenon? The projection mechanism and the phenomenological method of empathic understanding were situated in the same affective entanglement of subject and object. Had not Van der Leeuw himself made this problem explicit when he argued

<sup>12</sup> Vestdijk 1975 [1948]:29–30. Vestdijk defines religion as a desire for and pursuit of unity, totality or “Totalsinn,” referring to the phenomenological tradition. Cf. ibid.:11–12.

that there was no “outside” position from which the world or the “self” could be understood?<sup>13</sup> Understanding phenomena was eventually the same as understanding the subject’s own structuring of reality.

Sierksma’s involvement in the projection debate culminated in the publication of *De religieuze projectie* [The religious projection] in 1956, an intellectual masterpiece that can be regarded as the most important publication in Dutch psychology of religion in the 1950s (Van Belzen 2007:184–193). In this study Jungian psychology is no longer the dominant theory. The starting point is Helmut Plessner’s *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* [The Gradation of the Organic and the Human Being] published in 1928. Sierksma argues that projection is always the subjective component in perception activity.<sup>14</sup> To understand the typical human features of subjectivity in perception Sierksma takes up Plessner’s distinctions between the centricity of animals in their natural environment and human eccentricity (Plessner 1975 [1928]:309ff.). Like animals, humans, as far as they “are” a body with senses and instincts, live “centrically” in their environment, being able to create a world in which they can easily orientate themselves.<sup>15</sup> But unique for humans is their ability to objectify the world, to take a distance from the world they live in, and create an image of the world, i.e. to make a distinction between subject and object (Sierksma 1977 [1956]:21–22). In this sense human beings live “eccentrically”; they can experience themselves as being in the centre from an “objective” position. Being both centric and eccentric implies that the human being “knows that the world is actually different from how it is per-

<sup>13</sup> In a 1941 anthropological study Van der Leeuw’s starting point — referring to Plessner amongst others — are reflections on the relation between man and world addressing the problem that understanding the world (as object) is actually nothing else but understanding the structures humans have imposed on the world in order to understand it. That means that human beings only understands themselves, i.e. their thought constructions and perceptions of the world. In other words, they understand the ‘echo’ — one might say, projection — of themselves (Van der Leeuw 1941:11–24).

<sup>14</sup> Sierksma 1977 [1956]:64. “De eenheid in de verscheidenheid der projectie-verschijnselen is het feit, dat de mens weet, dat zijn eigen waarnemingen zo goed als die van andere levende wezens een wereld scheppen, die niet samenvalt met de wereld-van-die-waarnemingen” (ibid.:7).

<sup>15</sup> Sierksma 1977 [1956]:20. Apparently Sierksma had a profound interest in animal psychology and spent a lot of time in the Zoological Laboratory in Leiden observing the behaviour of sticklebacks. Cf. Leertouwer 1991:208.



ceived.” The human being knows that he is projecting — he is *homo proiciens* — and he knows he has to deproject in order to know the world as it really is (ibid.:25–26).

What is this projection? According to Sierksma, the centricity and eccentricity of human beings can be described in terms of psychic conflict. Essential in psychic life is not a mystic participation in totality or a harmonious development of the individual, but the conflict between self-consciousness and the autonomous unconscious with its own laws and mechanisms (drives) on an organic basis (body). “The human being is an animal thrown out of balance”; he has lost centricity and the accuracy of animal instincts is not to be found in humans. The drives are excessive and spontaneously trigger feelings of helplessness that can only be overcome as far as the human being is able to control his inner life and the outside world from an eccentric position — culture is nothing but a system of defense against nature (ibid.:70ff.). Psychological conflict and helplessness are thus the driving forces in one’s ongoing attempts to find an (unstable) balance both in the inner life and in the outside world. Projection is *the* mechanism that secures humans from being overwhelmed by the drives and thus supports psychological balance by creating an image of the world. Religious projection is then seen by Sierksma as a form of common projection (ibid.:156). An inner “something” that threatens psychological balance is projected onto the outside world as a mysterious “something” — Sierksma thus defines religion as the awareness that “there is something” (ibid.:135). With this definition Sierksma avoids Van der Leeuw’s theology. The eccentric position of the human being contradicts any attempt to view religion as a totality in which the subject participates; there is always some hidden aspect beyond the borders of any world view.

The key issue is no longer the relation between primitive mentality and modern mentality, but non-projection (in earliest childhood), projection and deprojection.<sup>16</sup> The theory of eccentricity and projection is a further step in an intellectual development away from Lévy-Bruhl’s

<sup>16</sup> This is exactly what Sierksma aims at and admired in Vestdijk: a theory of religion, not based on or culminating in a Christian perspective, but a theory of religion based on a mechanism that could be found in all religions, even that religion which, because of its supposed atheistic nature, had always posed a problem in the study of religions, Buddhism (ibid.:175).

concept of mystical participation, Van der Leeuw's phenomenological method of empathic understanding, theology in general, and also Jung's ideas on archetypes. Next to Plessner, and probably under influence of the critique of Vestdijk associating his "reductionism" with Freud's studies in applied psychoanalysis, Freudian anthropology with its emphasis on inner conflicts, the human being's helplessness and desperate attempts to gain control over an unstable environment, is positively valued (ibid.:59). In this context religion is not only a cultural system providing stability and unity, but also has an "uncanny" trait: revelation is a disruptive experience that only confirms the instability of the environment (ibid.:ch. 4). Because of the inevitable separation of subject and object Sierksma finishes his book with a plea for deprojection as it is found in Buddhism, a religion that like a science is "the last step out of humanity's childhood, out of a world where mind-created figures populated a metaphysical heaven and hell."<sup>17</sup> The notion of eccentricity and the need for control over the natural environment make it possible to both understand and explain a wished-for participation in totality. Sierksma's plea for deprojection is then a radical acceptance of the subject-object dichotomy, of the eccentricity and lack of inner coherence (or totality) of the human being.

Psychological conflict and helplessness cause projection. Religious projection provides psychological balance. Religion's primal function is to provide stability and security. Deprojection as found in science (of religion) and Buddhism is necessary in order to understand religion and accept the eccentricity of the human being. The task of the scholar in science of religion is to understand religious phenomena in the light of their function: the balance a certain culture seeks for individuals and groups (Van Iersel 1991:85). In Sierksma's later writings in the field of science of religion this is the starting point. In *The Gods as we*

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<sup>17)</sup> Ibid.:175–177. We should notice here that Jung held similar ideas on deprojection. In the context of discussing Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism in *Psychologie und Religion* Jung argues that in individual development towards becoming "Self" (as the sum of conscious and unconscious phenomena) the illusionary anthropomorphic projections of gods and demons should be "taken back." This deprojection would bring back the projected elements of the soul to their psychic origin. Cf. Jung 1963:90–93.

*shape them* (1960) Sierksma's views on (ec)centricity and religious projection are clearly reflected when he writes: "Both animals and man need fixed points by which they can orient themselves and 'know where they are'. Man too needs security, something to hold on to" (Sierksma 1960:28). The inner world of the drives is projected onto the outside world and in religious representations and the images of gods (as part of culture) one can always recognize man's projections and inner conflicts in the gods that man both desires and fears to be, says Sierksma. "The fundamental feature of the psychic structure is the duality of man." On the one hand he is corporeal "in a situation that gives pleasure and satisfaction." "On the other hand he can stand detached from himself" and "consider himself objectively and analytically." Through projection this centricity and eccentricity is also characteristic of the gods — on the one hand they are part of the world (centric), on the other hand they are purely spiritual beings beyond the world (eccentric). The tension between these two poles is nowhere more in evidence than in Buddhism, trusting completely in the human mind and thus arriving at "absolute objectivity and absolute analysis" (ibid.:40).

In his major 1966 study *Tibet's Terrifying Deities* the key ideas on religious projection and Sierksma's fascination for Buddhism are central elements. Humans are always in conflict and religious projection, which serves to provide security and stability, will eventually fail its objective — ultimately human beings have to reconcile themselves with the fact that they are eccentric and only thus they can "conquer the false reality" of the drives, fears and conflicts projected in the outside world (ibid.:42). In Tibetan Buddhism this deprojection is accomplished. The ancient Tibetan terrifying deities are acknowledged in later Buddhism as existing, yet unreal. The old deities are regarded to be the projection of the "dreadful sensory world, of nature, the body, sensuality and self-destroying lust" i.e. "the projection of that human deficiency caused by the relative tension between the ego and the eccentric centre" (Sierksma 1966:143, 158). What fascinates Sierksma in Tibet's acculturation processes is the shift from an old religion, in which human aggressiveness is projected onto the outside world and takes the shape of terrifying deities, to applying sublimated aggressivity in order to destroy the illusionary gods as well as the illusionary

ego. Thus Buddhism is characterized by the movement towards eccentricity in which a purely analytical perspective is realized.<sup>18</sup>

Though Sierksma's book on religious projection is largely unknown outside the Netherlands, this text is of vital importance for understanding Sierksma's analysis of Tibet's religious history.

In the process of emancipating science of religion, in his urge to integrate scientific explanation in a phenomenology solely dominated by subjective understanding and self expression and through his involvement in the projection debate, Sierksma turned to depth psychology/psychoanalysis and philosophical anthropology. Rethinking the phenomenological method was thus the beginning of the emergence of psychology of religion in the Netherlands after the Second World War. From the late 1950s on Sierksma himself focused on comparative religion and modern cultural anthropology. Outside the Netherlands he is thus primarily known as a cultural anthropologist. Psychoanalysis always remained a point of reference in his work and at the University of Leiden he would always consider psychology of religion his discipline (Van Belzen 2007:193). Yet, Sierksma was an isolated scholar, engaged in many conflicts with colleagues and having few students. His projects, rooted in the entanglement of phenomenology and psychology of religion, were not further elaborated upon by others.

### **Fortmann, Psychology of Religion and Participation**

"We will have to consider theoretical atheism — Marx and Freud — as the effect of a structure of consciousness and hence ask ourselves why atheism cannot but regard God as a fiction, a creation by humans out of need, in short as a projection. The projection theory is the outcome of a change in our structure of consciousness, which one can provisionally indicate as the separation of subject and object." "The subject of this study is the projection theory as manifestation of our one-sided scientific culture" (Fortmann 1981 [1964]:I, 28–29). These are sentences from the introductory chapter of Han Fortmann's 1966–

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<sup>18)</sup> Especially in the chapter on shamanism and mysticism (Chöd) this issue is elaborated upon (Sierksma 1966:141–159).

1968 *Als ziende de Onzienlijke* [Envisioning the Invisible] in which he puts forward the main hypothesis of his study, namely that ‘the’ projection theory as manifestation of a specific scientific culture is not useful as a theory to understand religious perception. Fortmann (1912–1970) had been appointed professor of general and comparative psychology of culture and religion at Nijmegen University in 1956. From his earliest writings on his main concern is the growing distance between the official Catholic Church doctrine and pastoral practice. In his view theology has a lot to gain from the human sciences, from psychotherapy and psychology as auxiliary sciences, to re-establish the relation between theology and practice. With this objective his work can be situated in a broad international development in the fields of practical theology, pastoral psychology and psychology of religion. Scholars such as Heye Faber (in the Netherlands) or Joachim Scharfenberg (in Germany) can be located in this context of turning to psychological theories as a critical and constructive potential for theology.

Fortmann’s main alternative to projection theories, and the most important subject of his study, is religious experience. Opposing the alleged reductionism of projection theorists such as Freud, Jung, Vestdijk and Sierksma, he puts forward his ideas on religious experience in the modern world. Religious experience originates where humans perceive their world as contingent, incomprehensible, unknown and opaque. This does not evoke a religious experience of the transcendent as a “nature reserve for God” outside this world, but as an inner-worldly transcendence (ibid.:312–313). Unfortunately, Fortmann suggests, modern human beings have lost the ability to naturally intuit the spiritual in physical reality, and have become merely spectators of themselves and the world. This subject-object dichotomy is modern, and with it the perception of the world as either objective (rational scientific) or subjective (the projection of needs, wishes, affects). The alternative is to be found in the existential experience of a deeper mystery and ultimate meaning of life beyond the worldly contingencies. In religious experience one thus finds what the projection theorists neglected: “that seeing is a response to the fact that there is something to see” (ibid.:411), a formulation that echoes Van der Leeuw’s depiction of the phenomenon that can be understood as far as it shows itself.

One of the issues that Fortmann addresses in his voluminous — and hardly systematic<sup>19</sup> — study is the aim of projection. According to Fortmann, projection theorists consider the aim of the mechanism either as defense or as a way to restore unity or security. As to the latter aspect of the projection theory he notices that Jung had related this state of unity to Lévy-Bruhl's concept of mystic participation (ibid.:366). Hence, he gives an extensive introduction to Lévy-Bruhl and presents an outline of the main critical points that have been made against this theory of primitive mentality and mystic participation (mostly formulated by Lévy-Bruhl himself in his posthumously published *Carnets*; ibid.:478–517). According to Fortmann, participation should not be interpreted as the effect of projection, but as the awareness of coherences and relations between “things.” The primitives were not yet isolated subjects that projected, but they had certain knowledge of their world in which they lived and were integrated. Mystic participation should thus not be seen as an attempt to construct a stable environment out of a sense of helplessness or eccentricity. Lévy-Bruhl and Van der Leeuw were actually right when they interpreted participation as the undividedness of subject and world. This is exactly what is lost in religion in the modern secularized world, but what could be rediscovered in religious experience. In line with Van der Leeuw, modern human beings are seen as having lost contact with their own primitive nature (as *homo religiosus*) through the modern subject-object dichotomy.

When Fortmann evaluates the first volume of his study he writes: “our aim was to save perception, especially primitive, naive, spontaneous perception. I must admit, that I made this effort in order to save the faith of believers” (Fortmann 1981 [1964]:II, 31). We might add that Fortmann did more than just trying to save primitive perception. He also “saved” religious participation and even Van der Leeuw's phenomenology.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup>) See Van Belzen 2007:223ff.

<sup>20</sup>) “De fenomenologische antropologie ontkent het uitgangspunt, dat door de projectiepsychologen wordt ingenomen: de scheiding tussen subject en wereld. Zij beschouwt met Binswanger die scheiding als ‘Krebsübel aller Psychologie’” (Fortmann 1981 [1964]:I, 381).

### Van der Lans and “Giving Ultimate Meaning”

The projection debate that started with Vestdijk’s essay and ended twenty years later with Fortmann’s magnum opus shows how the emergence of psychology of religion in the Netherlands was entangled with Van der Leeuw’s phenomenology and reception of Lévy-Bruhl, and with Sierksma’s attempts to emancipate science of religion from theology which provoked Fortmann’s reaction defending participation (in a meaningful totality) and religious experience.

Sierksma’s difficult character and his many conflicts made him an isolated figure at Leiden University, a scholar who was only late in his career rewarded with a professorship, and without students who could continue his line of research. Fortmann on the other hand did have students who would pursue academic careers in psychology of religion and dominate future (and even present-day) debates in this field.<sup>21</sup> The influence of Fortmann can certainly be found in the work of the psychologist of religion Jan van der Lans (1933–2002). He “pursued the agenda” of Fortmann, i.e. the project of saving religion and religious experience by searching for a second primitivity in a modern secularized world. Key concepts in his work are: “experience, myth, giving ultimate meaning, and again experience” (Janssen 2006). When elaborating on the disappearance of the mythical-religious world view in modernity Van der Lans describes mythical thinking in terms of participation, a world of unity without separation between nature and culture, subjective and objective reality.<sup>22</sup> He explicitly refers to Lévy-Bruhl and Van der Leeuw as scholars who reflected on “mythical consciousness,” a synonym for primitive mentality.<sup>23</sup> Opposed to this

<sup>21</sup>) “Het godsdienstpsychologisch onderzoek dat sinds het aantreden van Han Fortmann op deze universiteit [Nijmegen] verricht is, heeft bij voortduring de grenzen van de kerkelijke instituties opgezocht. Het werk van Fortmann, Weima, Berger, Van der Lans en Van Uden, maar ook het onderzoek dat ik zelf met collega’s heb verricht, wordt gekenmerkt door een zoeken naar religiositeit op onverwachte plaatsen. Een zoeken naar de verborgen psychologische kern, gedragen door Fortmanns roep om een herstel van de religieuze ervaring” (Janssen 2007:114).

<sup>22</sup>) In his essay “Geloven: een kwestie van fantasie. Een godsdienstpsychologische bijdrage aan een hedendaagse verantwoording van het godsdienstige geloven” (Van der Lans 2006:52–71).

<sup>23</sup>) Ibid.:58. Compare also Van der Lans 1978:38ff.

mythical consciousness is our modern rationalized world with its divisions into domains: inner subjective reality, inter-subjective reality (collective norms, ideas and values) and the world of the physical objects. This “lost” mythical consciousness should be rediscovered as a religious ideal in everyday life and in the longing for the *Deus absconditus*. Participation is again seen as an alternative to a modern subject-object dichotomy in a secularized society.

In this context the concept of “giving ultimate meaning” (*zingeving*) became important in his work. Giving meaning is regarded as a general human psychic function in which perceptions are processed and ordered in a world view. This is not only an everyday automatic process, but, according to Van der Lans, human beings are also “disposed to ask the ultimate meaning questions that can result in a religious experience.”<sup>24</sup> This religious experience is not the experience of a God that reveals himself, but must be regarded as a “core experience” in which “the true authentic self is qualified with a transcendental dimension.”<sup>25</sup> It is an experience of being related to a totality of existence, of being part of a totality of meaning. It is an inner-worldly experience of transcendence, of being elevated above the field of everyday life. This process of giving ultimate meaning is thus related to the old issue of participation in a meaningful totality against the background of a modern secularized world. Interestingly, in this process of giving meaning fantasy and imagination play key roles. Though projection theory was sharply refuted by Fortmann, the rise of new psychological theories in the 1970s (e.g. Kohut’s and Erikson’s self psychologies) meant that the function of “projection” could now be positively valued as the subject’s constitutive capacities for an all-embracing world view. “Faith,” Van der Lans writes, “is an affective relationship with an object that can only be grasped in images.” “Nobody has ever seen God. But when I detect the feeling in myself that there is someone who speaks to me, I cannot do anything else but form an image with the help of my imagination. For a modern anthro-

<sup>24</sup>) See Van der Lans’ essay “Zingeving en zingevingsfuncties van religie bij stress” (Van der Lans 2006:72–127); quote from p. 87.

<sup>25</sup>) See Van der Lans’ essay “Kernervaring, esthetische emotie en religieuze betekenisgeving” (Van der Lans 2006:128–163); quote from p. 140.



pology of faith this seems to me of extreme importance.”<sup>26</sup> Hence, the mechanism of projection reappears in the guise of imagination, fantasy and giving ultimate meaning, in the mental activity of making an image of an object one cannot know otherwise, and in the subjective meaning-giving structuring of the world. This process indicates the elevation of “whole man” above everyday life in order to participate in a totality of meaning.<sup>27</sup>

Van der Lans put the issue of giving ultimate meaning on the agenda of psychology of religion in the Netherlands.<sup>28</sup> In an intellectual line of thought from Van der Leeuw up to present discussions on *zingeving* the key issues are the natural inclinations of the human being towards giving ultimate meaning and to proceed in a process of “broadening of the ego” and growing in understanding coherence. It is a discourse on *homo religiosus* who through self-transcendence participates in a totality of meaning experienced in a modern secularized world.

### Evaluation: Giving Ultimate Meaning

In current discussions in the field of psychology of religion and mental care in the Netherlands the issue of giving ultimate meaning has become the main issue.<sup>29</sup> The discussions partly focus on worldly pastoral care, that is, mental care practiced by specialists in existential questions and problems concerning giving meaning to life without a direct relation with a religious institution or tradition. The idea here is that, as Van der Lans already indicated, giving ultimate meaning is a general everyday human psychological function. Existential questions and problems give rise to a more existentially conscious reflection on giving meaning. The worldly “pastor” could guide such a process in which the boundaries between giving meaning and faith become fluid. As Stroeken indicates, “meaning has something to do with being part

<sup>26</sup> In Van der Lans, “Geloven: een kwestie van fantasie” (Van der Lans 2006:52–71); quote from p. 67.

<sup>27</sup> Compare Zock 2007:17.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.:21–22, 27. Van Belzen 1998:215.

<sup>29</sup> Key publications in this field are Van Uden 1996, Stroeken 1999, Alma 2005, Van der Lans 2006 and Zock 2007.

of a larger totality” and this fact makes a transition into a religious discourse probable when one considers that a sense of participation is the inner core of religious traditions (Stroeken 1999:93). Zock writes that giving meaning should first of all be considered a general human function indicating both religious and non-religious processes of the formation of a world view (Zock 2007:9). Such statements suggest that the issue of giving ultimate meaning as a general human psychological function is religiously neutral, and that under certain circumstances it can open up the domain of the religious. And indeed, exactly this is often put forward in profiling the worldly pastor next to a traditional pastor, or in promoting a more professional mental care. This supposed neutrality is however somewhat misleading, not only because it suggests that the worldly specialist in questions of existential meaning shares a common ground with psychologists,<sup>30</sup> but more importantly because it disregards the fact that in psychology of religion the discourse on giving ultimate meaning is rooted in Fortmann’s and Van der Lans’ project and their objective to “save” religious experience and the faith of believers. It was in this context that Van der Leeuw and his Lévy-Bruhl reception were taken up, and Sierksma’s critical reflections on the phenomenological method were refuted. His work was in a sense implicitly revalued when since the 1970s the constitutive importance of projection returned in a discourse on fantasy, imagination and symbolization. Nevertheless, the emphasis on giving ultimate meaning as a general psychic mechanism — as general as the projection mechanism in the writings of Vestdijk and Sierksma — veiled the fact that the importance of the issue emerged out of a discussion between theology and science of religion, and a theological objective to find a religious ground in mystic participation in the context of a secularized modern world characterized by the subject-object dichotomy and by what Fortmann called a one-sided scientific culture.

This complex background including the often unrecognized entanglement of psychology of religion and phenomenology of religion should be made more explicit and needs to be analyzed. This will not only help us to better understand the discussions on giving ultimate

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<sup>30</sup> This suggestion of a common ground (made by for example Zock) is problematic because many psychologists and psychotherapists will not regard ‘giving ultimate meaning’ as belonging to their domain; cf. Stroeken 1997:93.

meaning, but also deepens the self-understanding of those who work as worldly “pastors” in the field of mental care. For psychology of religion in the Netherlands its historic entanglement with phenomenology of religion is important to “remember and work through” — to paraphrase Freud. After all, psychology of religion seems to be in a process of transition, leaving behind the old theological project of contributing to the relation between theology and faith practice, and instead focusing on what is currently called “lived religion” in and outside religious institutions and traditions in an intercultural context.<sup>31</sup> This transition implies a movement towards phenomenological approaches in closer cooperation with religious studies. As history tends to repeat itself, this means — as Sierksma once did — taking a critical stance towards implicit theological convictions and objectives that are conspicuous in theories on seemingly general human mental activities. Only this time the objective should not be to articulate the differences between theology and religious studies, but to arrive at a critical self-understanding in the context of interdisciplinarity. In this context and on a theoretical level a certain reappraisal of Sierksma’s attempts to combine Freudian psychoanalysis — especially concerning the issue of helplessness — philosophical anthropology (centricity vs. eccentricity) and science of religion might be an interesting starting point.

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<sup>31)</sup> See for example Failing & Heimbrock 1998, Gräb 2000 and Ganzevoort 2006.

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## Review Essay

### Contemporary Theories of Religion: A Critical Companion

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*Contemporary Theories of Religion: A Critical Companion* (Routledge), edited by Michael Stausberg, presents a series of reviews of some of the major “contemporary” theories of religion. The chapters are surveys of the theories and as such cannot deal with any of them in great depth. Despite this fact, the book should be a useful starting point for students interested in theory and a way for scholars of religion to get their bearings on some of the latest theories. Those more skeptical of the possibility of grand theories, whom Stausberg refers to as “anti-theorists” (14) will probably be less satisfied since many of their concerns are, frankly, not the concern of this book. However at least one contributor, Hughes, wonders whether general theories about religion are possible at all. The vast majority of the theories come out of the cognitive science of religion. The remaining few could be divided into social-systems perspectives and rhetorical approaches that argue for a clear religious or atheist agenda. Stausberg is correct to conclude that the volume offers ample “food for further thought” (292), as such the book is highly recommended. In what follows I summarize the main currents in each chapter and offer limited comment of my own.

In their chapter, Engler and Gardiner provide a somewhat erratic review of Lawson and McCauley's (ritual) theory of religion, trying to do a lot of noble things in a short amount of space. They provide good summary of the numerous criticisms of the theory. Like subsequent chapters in the volume however, this one is too short to go into any depth about the theory and the criticisms, so the reader does not get a solid sense of either. Engler and Gardiner also present an insightful new criticism based on a neglected semantic argument in *Rethinking Religion*. Almost half of the chapter focuses on this dimension of the argument, a marvelous five pages for any student of the semantics of religion. Curiously though, the reviewers neglect the very important argument presented by Davis (2007), a Davidsonian critique of Lawson and McCauley.<sup>1</sup> Though I sympathize strongly with the argument and desire to take semantics more seriously, this may distort the overall picture of the "contemporary theory." Unlike most of the other chapters in the volume this chapter is as much about Engler and Gardiner's theory as it is about Lawson and McCauley.

Saler writes an excellent and concise summary of Guthrie's theory and those that influenced it (Tyler and Horton). He points out that Guthrie provides more of a theory of anthropomorphism than religion as such. Saler does not make clear the differences between animism, agency, intentionality, and anthropomorphism, though this is probably because Guthrie is not so clear about them in the two iterations of his theory and because the subsequent literature has made a mess of them. For a clearer view, Lisdorf (2007) is a good place to start.<sup>2</sup> Agency is something we attribute to, for example, dots on a screen, when we perceive them as animate. This is what Lisdorf and others call *biological motion*. It is helpful for animals to attribute biological, self-propelled motion, and better to be safe than sorry, for example, when a twig snaps in the bush and we are rushed full of adrenaline. For Guthrie the central element of anthropomorphism is the attribution of complex symbolic capacities, that is, language. As Saler notes, Guthrie

<sup>1</sup>) Scott Davis, "Donald Davidson, Anomalous Monism and the Study of Religion." *MTR* 19 (2007):200–231.

<sup>2</sup>) See Anders Lisdorf, "What's HIDD'n in the HADD?" *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 7 (2007):341–353.

emphasizes “the attribution of will, purpose, and intelligence to the non-human world,” and above all “capacities to send and receive messages” (44). *Contra* Saler then, Guthrie’s theory does not revolve so much around “what we today term the attribution of agency,” (46) but rather is closer to what Lisdorf calls the HIDD, “Hyperactive Intentionality Detector”.

This function also seems closer to what we now call “mentalizing.” Mentalizing is what anthropomorphism involves over and above animistic agency. All animals are sensitive to agency, but what sets human animals apart is extreme sensitivity to language or “intelligence.” The primary domain of mentalizing and anthropomorphism is folk psychology while the primary domain for animistic agency is folk physics (and perhaps biology) with its distinction between animate and inanimate: objects tend to stay at rest unless acted on by an outside force, unless of course, they are *alive*. Aside from this very interesting connection to subsequent research in the cognitive science of religion, Saler also wants to push Guthrie on the nonhuman or superhuman features of gods. In other words he wants Guthrie to account for the “counterintuitive” features of religion. The distinction appears to ride on whether one considers these mechanisms automated features of perception, or automated features of cognition and memory. Perhaps these two modes are not that far apart if we accept Guthrie’s premise that perception is always interpretation. This would leave room for combining the relevance-based,<sup>3</sup> epidemiological approach of Boyer, with Guthrie’s perceptual strategy approach, which also appears relevance driven in that the best bets “are those with the highest informational payoffs and lowest risks” (49).

In the next chapter, Benavides surveys the entire catalog of Burkert’s writings about religion, rather than focusing on a limited few as the previous two chapters. Benavides lays out the most important concepts in Burkert’s theory and how they relate to one another. Burkert’s argument is grounded in ethology in the sense that he finds adaptive continuity between human behavior and the behavior of other animals. Benavides thus cogently makes the case for the usefulness of Burkert’s

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<sup>3</sup> See Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1995), *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell).



theory in the cognitive science of religion. The brevity of the chapter requires that Benavides can only mention a number of interesting theories and concepts that he derives from Burkert — such as the connection between ritual and “practical concerns” such as eating meat, dealing with social hierarchy, and displaying fitness — and the important role that emotions (like fear), acts of violence, and meta-representing play in religion. The footnotes are meant to direct the reader in the right direction, but the ideas are thrown out so quickly, one has difficulty delimiting Burkert’s actual theory of religion. Perhaps this is necessary to get at the density that clearly characterizes Burkert’s reflections on religion. So, much like the previous chapters, this chapter acts as a kind of entry point into the theory but does not offer substantial grounding in that theory. It whets the appetite but does not provide much sustenance.

Segal’s chapter is on Rappaport’s ritual theory of religion. The chapter pivots on the charge of functionalism. Segal argues that Rappaport’s early functionalism evolved into formalism, and Segal finds both problematic. With regard to the former, Segal reiterates the well-worn criticism of functionalism first set out by Hempel and emphasized strongly in the study of religion by Penner (288). The gist is that functionalism usually fails as a form of explanation on logical grounds. Segal notes that Rappaport failed to address the central point of the critique, that functionalism usually commits the fallacy of affirming the consequence. In other words, “it works backwards” (71). Segal actually prefers the hard-line functional approach Rappaport took in his early opus *Pigs for the Ancestors*, even though he disagrees with functionalism, to Rappaport’s later work that departs from causal functionalism to a definitional and metaphysical formalism. His legacy, he argues, “rests with *Pigs*” (77). This is presumably because of the valuable contribution Rappaport’s ecological approach provides to the study of religion. The rest of Segal’s chapter on Rappaport’s later work primarily takes issue with Rappaport’s inordinate focus on ritual at the expense of belief. Overall the chapter is primarily a critique, so to some extent it assumes previous familiarity with Rappaport. Since *Pigs* was published in 1968 perhaps it is a misnomer to call this a “contemporary” theory of religion, a complaint that could be leveled at many of the entries in the volume, though of course all of the theories in the

book are being chewed over by scholars of religion *right now*; perhaps “recent” works better.

Alles’s chapter on Stark’s sociological approach does a good job at both explicating the theoretical heart of the approach and offering nuanced, lucid criticism. Ultimately Alles thinks an economic theory is a necessary Lockean correlate to the current trend toward Kantian cognition. One cannot explain religion without clarity on how cognitive constraints are activated by decision making agents in the real world. Religion turns out to be rational, for the most part, given certain cognitive constraints and the limited nature of information. But Alles and Stark have quite different ideas about what this rationality means. Stark’s version of rational-choice theory (“think cost benefit analysis, the ‘law’ of supply and demand,” 84) generates a “Reaganesque” (83) picture of the religious marketplace, which “neglects the role that reciprocity plays in human decision-making in interactive contexts” (96). In sum Alles and Stark disagree considerably on the nature of intelligent agents and their place in a religious environment. Alles would seem to lean towards a notion of a Bayesian agent, who makes provisional, probabilistic decisions in light of limited information. The environment plays far less a limiting role than in Stark’s theory which Alles considers static and places too many constraints on intelligent agents (see Alles discussion of the failure of the concept of “tension” between individual and environment to account for religious choices, 94). The constraints tend to create systems where the optimal outcome is Protestant Christianity. Thus Stark’s theory “tacitly presumes the characteristics it seeks to explain” (96). I think this criticism may apply to all theories of religion in the book, and to most theories of religion in general, perhaps because as Frankenberg puts it: “Unlike other contexts in which we study people’s economic status or political actions, frequently dispensing with their own intentions, desires, beliefs, hopes, and fears, there is no distinguishable religious context that can be discerned apart from people’s propositional attitudes.”<sup>4</sup>

Beyer has the difficult task of encapsulating Luhmann’s theory of religion in twelve pages. Instead of trying to present his whole theory

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<sup>4</sup>) Nancy Frankenberg (2007), “Weakening Religious Belief: Vattimo, Rorty, and the Holism of the Mental,” in Santiago Zabala (ed.), *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo* (McGill-Queen’s University Press), 273–296 (286).

he focuses on “religion as communication,” paying particular attention to Luhmann’s ruminations on ritual. This is a prudent procedure and allows him to focus on those aspects of the theory most relevant to scholars of religion, at the same time giving a sense of the complexity in Luhmann’s thought.

Society is an emergent property of communication. While the human body and individual human consciousness are necessary for society to take place, Luhmann regards communication as its most fundamental aspect. Individuals are not the primary components of society, but rather “communications,” which are syntheses of three “selections”: “information, utterance (*Mitteilung*), understanding” (101). The first is the content of communication, the second is the fact of communication (which sounds quite similar to Grice’s informational and communicative intentions), and the third is the reception of the utterance. Communication emerges only in the context of this synthesis. A primary characteristic of most forms of communication appears to be that it is “risky:” it is contingent, likely to fail, or uncertain.

Religion enters this story primarily as a paradoxical form of communication in which, especially in the case of ritual rigidity, the risk is limited. On the one hand, religious communication is theoretically suspicious because of the problematic ontological status of gods; in other words religious people are not really communicating with anyone. More importantly for Luhmann, ritual is not communication because “it does not differentiate between the informative and performative acts of communication, between *information* and *utterance*” (105). The content, so Luhmann thinks, is basically equivalent to the speech act itself. The medium is strictly the message; there is no risk. On the other hand, religion *is* communication, structured around “the core distinction between transcendent and imminent, or what Luhmann calls the binary code of religion” (102); it is “only as communication . . . that religion exists in society” (103). The ontological status of gods, or “the degree to which anthropomorphic beings can operate as real actors in society,” is actually not at issue in Luhmann’s theory of communication because the tripartite “selections” noted above are not based on communicators but rather communications. Communication is attributed to actors in this process but it does not derive from them.

As Beyer goes on to intimate, perhaps this so-called paradox is merely enunciating two different aspects of religion: revelatory events,

by which I mean performances where people pretend and believe they are communicating with “anthropomorphic beings,” and subsequent detailed interpretation around those performances. It is ironic that such a developed social thinker as Luhmann should revert back to an individualistic model of communication when he sets his sights on religion. In performance the actors, since they follow a script, are communicating with the audience more than they are with one another. Those revelatory moments are part of a broader communicatory process, not communicative events in themselves. So as Beyer suggest, perhaps his theory ultimately implicates an underlying Protestant conception of religion, in the sense that religion is understood as a private attitude of faith (110).

Day provides a characteristically lucid and philosophically sharp summary and criticism of Newberg et al.’s “neurotheological” theory of religion. Day presents a surprisingly balanced account of their position, despite the fact that the science behind it is quite controversial among neuroscientists.<sup>5</sup> The most fundamental problem, though Day does not express it in quite this way, is that they base their theory of religion on “mystical experience,” an error most students of religion stopped perpetuating many years ago. The primary engine for the theory, according to Day, is SPECT brain scans that reveal deactivation in the left posterior superior parietal lobe, which “is thought to regulate our awareness of our surroundings” (118), when religious professionals (such as Buddhists and Franciscans) do their thing (“at the peaks” of meditation and prayer). The authors think the experiment is isolating an impairment in the “ability to distinguish between *self* and *non-self*” (118). From this type of reasoning Newberg and his colleagues apparently go on to assert that the mystical experience is real, in other words, really a communion with superhuman agency.

The most ironic point in Day’s criticism is that Newberg thinks the neurological firings vindicate first person accounts of mystical experience. At the same time, those first person accounts are jettisoned and replaced by “homogenized descriptions” of Newberg et al.’s own makings.

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed criticism of the “neuroscience”, see Uffe Schjoedt, “The Religious Brain: A General Introduction to the Experimental Neuroscience of Religion.” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 21 (2009):315–318, 322–328.

Catholic nuns and Buddhist nuns actually do not describe the same experience.

For Day, the book is just plain wrong in its “modified natural theological case for the neurological authenticity of mystical experience,” and “the slippery philosophical transition from talking about the neurological foundations of religious experience to discussing the noetic content of these experiences.” However, it is “*importantly* wrong” in its limiting of what counts as religion to the special, the impractical, the temporary; to a unique sphere of life that would need a dedicated neurological mechanism (126). This is where Day sees what he calls neurotheology’s rival “cognitive science of religion” offering an important corrective, because it regards religious cognition as largely continuous with the rest of cognition.

On this note it is interesting that Day allows for only two camps in a naturalistic approach to religion: neurotheology and cognitive science of religion. The first we have discussed, though I have doubts about whether it can rightly be called a naturalistic approach (cognitive architecture evolved so that we can experience non-natural divinity). The second examines how universal cognitive architecture shapes and constrains religion, where religious thought and behavior is a meaningless byproduct of these structures (116). However, surely there have been more than two camps “over the last quarter century.” One notorious omission would be the “Aarhus School” of the cognitive science of religion, though Day perhaps sees this school as unimportant or a bastard child of the hard line cognitive approach to religion. I would disagree and see it as an important middle ground between the two camps.

Jensen tackles the “standard model of the cognitive science of religion” in his chapter. His presentation of the standard model and its alternative is fair and balanced. He focuses on the work of Boyer and Pyysiainen, though far more on the former than the latter. A substantial part of the chapter is spent on Sperber, who Jensen credits with providing the initial theoretical foundation for the standard model.

Jensen does a good job laying out Boyer’s contribution to theorizing about religion. For Boyer, innate, universally occurring mental architecture (“mental modules”) constrains religious concepts. This architecture is characterized by sets of independent expectations about the

world: intuitive expectations about objects (folk physics), agents/minds (folk psychology), and living things (folk biology). These expectations apply to specific “ontological” categories of things that are also intuitive: person, animal, plant, natural object, and artifact. When any of these three intuitive expectations are tweaked (breached or transferred) in their application to one of the five categories a counter-intuitive concept results. So we have a three by five matrix of fifteen basic counter-intuitive templates. These counter-intuitive templates are the cognitive basis for the memorable concepts that populate religion. Religion turns out to be quite a natural phenomenon that requires just a bit of tweaking of intuitive psychology to be produced and remembered.

Jensen presents a productive distinction in theories about religion between subject matter and theoretical object (130). In the case of Boyer, he argues that Boyer’s subject matter may be religion, but his object (objective) is to describe universal features of the mind. This is perhaps why Boyer is less concerned with explaining why people actually interact with these types of agents (the so-called Mickey Mouse problem), though he has some interesting ideas in that direction (it has to do with strategic information and relevance). This is where Jensen’s juxtaposition of Boyer with Pyysiainen is useful, because Pyysiainen incorporates Damasio’s work on emotion into Boyer’s theory of religion in an attempt to solve the Mickey Mouse problem (among others). Jensen does not go into very much detail about the theory, but instead criticizes Pyysiainen’s stance as a materialist (144–145).

Since Boyer played a central role in setting up the foundations of the cognitive science of religion, a critique of Boyer is also a critique of the standard model. For the most part, the critique centers on three related features: the standard model is individualistic, does not pay enough attention to language and intentionality, and offers “a rather narrow spectrum of what the cognitive sciences can offer” (146). With regard to the first, Jensen is at pains to show that culture (and religion) is not merely epiphenomenal but may actually be (downwardly) causal on the brain. With regard to the second, the mind is not fully in the head, so cognitive approaches miss the mark if they only look there. Language and its limitations, in fact, have been rather poorly theorized in standard CSR. This is ironic since much of the movement emerged

out of linguistics. But regardless, as Laidlaw notes, since intersubjective, historically contextual, dynamics provide the space in which ideas are spread, they cannot be ignored in theorizing about religion (148). Intersubjectivity includes “self-interpretation,” one’s own reasons for acting in specific ways, which is “affective,” i.e. causal. With regard to the third, Jensen argues that the mainstream of cognitive science appears more open to cultural approaches than the cognitive science of religion, for example, in the work of Tomasello, Donald, Frith, and LeDoux (146).

In the next chapter Bulbulia examines Atran’s *In Gods We Trust* and other work. He adeptly tells us how and where Atran fits in with the rest of the cognitive science of religion. Atran initiated the cognitive science of religion’s interest in something like counter-intuitive agents (along with Sperber and probably before Boyer), calling them “minimally counter-intuitive concepts” (160). Atran found that such concepts were not necessarily more memorable than intuitive concepts; only once they become embedded in narratives that combine intuitive and counter-intuitive concepts do they become more memorable. Atran thus pointed rightly to broader belief sets, since concepts are not transmitted as unitary sites of information all by themselves. Atran combined this idea further with Guthrie’s theory of anthropomorphism to show that it is not simply an issue of memory that makes religious concepts so widespread, but *perception*, in the sense that we have a perceptual bias to infer agency.

Atran’s other lasting legacy has been his incorporation of costly signaling theory into the study of religion. That theory is derived from biology, where it is argued that organisms often use display signals to advertise their fitness. These signals are energy demanding and therefore seem to run counter to the evolutionary paradigm. But what costs the organism in energy lost, it gains in reproductive success (finding better mates). In the case of humans, this idea of advertising is extended to costly behavior as a signal of membership and devotion to the group. Requiring these signals from individuals is a way, in the long run, to avoid moochers on the system. Groups thus encourage “hard to fake” signals. Such signals are hard to fake because, among other things, they take energy investment that a faker would not be willing to pay. The theory thus represents the integration of the

economies of biological and linguistic semiosis. Bulbulia wants to integrate these three legacies of Atran (MCI, agency, costly-signaling), to suggest the idea that there is something about counter-intuitive agents that lend themselves well to this type of advertising.

Bulbulia packs a lot more into his review of Atran. He suggests important differences between Atran and Whitehouse on modes of religion. He presents his own interesting pet distinction between “iReligion” and “eReligion” based on Chomsky’s distinction between internal and external linguistic systems, and with similar ramifications. He criticizes Atran for not paying enough attention to the role of culture in evolution (i.e. co-evolution), in effect arguing that eReligion can have downward effect on iReligion. Bulbulia is also quite critical of the idea that “general learning” (or general intelligence 168, 169) might be part of the explanation of religion, though he does not explain why.

The ultimate disagreement between Bulbulia and Atran is that Bulbulia thinks religion is an adaptation while Atran thinks religion is a by-product of adaptation. For Bulbulia, who thinks there is a “religion faculty,” (166) this is a major “deficit” of Atran’s approach (167). However Atran does not stray far from the functionalist tree: religion appeals to people because, for one, it satisfies “the tragedy of cognition,” which is human awareness of our own death and finitude (165).

In the next chapter, Bulbulia and Frean bravely set out on some unpopular theoretical territory through the lens of David Sloan Wilson’s theory of religion, opening up illuminating and challenging questions along the way. The chapter is a defense of a Wilson’s theory of religion as a group-level adaptation. The theory is based on Wilson’s work on multi-level (or group) selection, which contends that not only individual organisms or genes may serve as sites of natural selection, but groups themselves. Group selection evolves through the property of altruism. Altruistic behavior in cooperative groups promotes higher fitness than individualistic selfish behavior. But altruistic behavior is most “evolvable” in conditions where individuals can reliably signal their solidarity. Religion, so our authors argue, promotes altruism and solidarity, and evolved for precisely this reason. Religion generates useful fictions that promote this function (184); that is, religions evolve precisely because they promote in-group altruism. Aside from the role



of institutions in this process (Bulbulia and Frean think policing institutions do not play a big role in this process, while Wilson thinks they do), our three authors do not disagree on very much. They admit that this is a “methodological futurism” in the sense that Wilson’s approach to religion is largely programmatic (190).

Of course there are numerous avenues to criticize this approach. As the authors note, the two most common are the critique of group-level selection and cultural evolution. They also intimate that the critique of functionalism is not a problem, though they should read Segal’s chapter noted above. The problem with functionalism is not really that it is empirically problematic, but logically so. For example, Wilson describes why religion may be sufficient but not necessary for altruism. A further drawback is the vagueness about religion. When the discussion is not vague, it is circular. In other words it is hard to see whether Wilson, Bulbulia, and Frean are talking about the evolution of religion or the evolution of solidarity. Perhaps to them, these are no different, but then one wonders why we need the word religion, with all its baggage. This slipperiness may get them into trouble, when for example they make the dubious claim that “religious culture” (they often use religion as an adjective not a noun) is more resistant to change than other “domains,” like politics. When we consider that tribal kingship (bigmen) and warlordism are still probably the most common form of politics in the world today, we see that many other “domains” are just as conservative (and of course this is a classic historical question). They suggest this is not due to the relatively static nature of religious scripture, but rather some fundamental dynamic of religious culture itself.

One point that I think especially deserves more investigation, and may even help us understand the semantics of religion, is the connection Bulbulia and Frean make between hard to test convictions about (often invisible) counter-intuitive agents and costly signals (184). These beliefs may be epistemically costly in the way that other signals are energetically costly; one involves “information” and the other energy costs, which are perhaps two versions of the same thing (energy). In other words, conviction about often unobservable agents may serve as a better basis for costly signaling than “real facts.” If you devoutly believe clearly obvious things about the world, this could be as much due to epistemic hunger as cultural solidarity. But if you

devoutly believe clearly false things about the world, this may signal something entirely different; part of its cost is its falsity.

In the next chapter, Wiebe examines Lewis-Williams and Pearce's "explanation" of the origin of religion. Based on the comparison of rock art among contemporary hunter-gatherers (the San) and cave paintings dated to the Upper Paleolithic, these authors argue that religion originates in altered states of consciousness. These states ("products") are induced in the brain by various means and religion "makes sense of" them (202, 203). The most primitive form of religion, the "ur-religion" is therefore "some form of hunter-gatherer shamanism" (203). All religions have this ecstatic component and "involve altering human consciousness" (198). From Wiebe's description one gets the sense that their argument is quite a bit more complex and nuanced than this simplistic argument. The authors appear to be trying to establish a middle ground between neuroscience and culture, acknowledging the role that the "social contract" must play in relation to the "consciousness contract" (199). For example, they argue that the "Neolithic revolution" was a change in "symbolic consciousness" that caused changes in subsistence practices rather than the reverse (197). Religion is, in effect, the way in which people come to terms with changes in human consciousness (199).

Wiebe is surprisingly soft in his critique of this theory. By and large it sounds as if he approves of it, despite the obvious age-old problem of grounding an entire theory of religion in something called "religious experience." The authors seem to acknowledge that their theory is as much about art as religion, arguing that the two are intertwined, and that such art "gives illuminating clues" about its creator's beliefs (203). Religion and art both appear to spring from decoupling or meta-representation and it is thus likely that religion and art arose about the same time. But this approach appears to reduce religion to art and aesthetic experience. The idea is that there is some pure universal experience in altered states of consciousness that all people are trying to fathom. One doubts whether all religion is based on altered states of consciousness; and even if it were, experiencing cannot precede "making sense of" in any meaningful sense.

Though Wiebe mentions a version of this criticism (203), perhaps it is so basic to the study of religion, he did not feel the need to reiterate

it. Instead he somewhat half-heartedly focuses on a neurophysiological critique of Lewis-Williams and Pearce, which argues that most drug induced altered states do not correspond to their “three stages of trance” model. The authors responded by saying they do not argue that the states must be drug induced.

In the next chapter Hughes offers a robust critique and summary of Tweed’s theory of religion, set out in his book *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. We get a good sense of the theory from Tweed’s definition of religion: “Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries” (54/212). Thus for Tweed religions are emotional processes, “flowing” though time and space, that develop based on “organic (e.g. neural, physiological, emotional, and cognitive) and cultural (e.g. linguistic, tropic, and ritualistic) constraints” (212). Religions further “orientate and help devotees locate themselves individually, locally, and cosmically” and differ from other cultural “framing of emotions” by drawing on suprahuman forces (219). But religions do not just situate, they also motivate movement through “terrestrial, corporeal, and cosmic,” crossings (213).

For the most part Hughes’s chapter focuses on the very possibility of a general theory of religion. This problematic comes from two directions. First, citing the work of McCutcheon and Fitzgerald, Hughes seems critical of not just Tweed’s definition of religion, but any definition that would somehow privilege religion over other cultural forms. Second, he accuses Tweed of conflating two distinct intellectual projects (noted famously by JZ Smith, 216): the ethnographic and the encyclopedic. While the former is local, contextual, and real, the latter is categorical, universalizing, and shadowy. Hughes thinks Tweed’s own local fieldwork with a Cuban community in Miami is rich, real, and complex, but when he moves to the task of generating a universal theory of religion, all is lost, and little is gained.

Hughes appears to be what Stausberg called in the Introduction an “anti-theorist.” (14) Aside from the point that Tweed’s conceptualization of religion is largely metaphorical, his critique could apply to any theory of religion. He lauds Orsi’s indication that religion can only be studied at the local level (221). In an inductive mode, when local

details are subsumed in larger theories we lose precisely those nuances we hoped to explain, while in a deductive mode, when local details are forced to fit larger theories they become distorted. To be fair, Hughes poses most of these points as questions, questions that get to the very heart of the edited volume as a whole. A small point would be to note that retreating to the local level does not rid you of theories. Thus anti-theory has a tendency to be made up of a bunch of little theories that a scholar either refuses to acknowledge or that do not amount to much.

Seiwert presents Rue's "theory" of religion. It is not so much a theory as an attempt at a noble deception to create a "new religion" of "eco-centric morality" (237) as an alternative to consumerism. The punch-line of Rue's mythology comes at the end of the chapter where we are told that in a previous book Rue, "argues for the necessity of inventing a 'noble lie... to reenchant the universe' as an adaptive strategy 'for opposing the maladaptive truth of nihilism...'" (239). Thus Seiwert rightly concludes that Rue's book is a myth masquerading as theory. But anyway, it is a rather compelling myth.

The basic idea is functionalist: religions ideally promote emotions that lead to wholeness and social coherence, which Rue sees as "the ultimate purpose of human meaning and existence" (231). Rue pushes this idea further arguing that evolution also has a meaning, a purpose, a "*telos*": to "endure and reproduce" (229). So not only do we have myth masquerading as theory, we have an outright distortion of the theory of evolution. Of course the scientific theory of evolution has no *telos*, that is what makes it so compelling. Seiwert gives a worthy parable of this criticism, arguing we could just as easily say the *telos* of evolution is *extinction*: "natural selection is basically a process of elimination" (229). Rue thus makes species survival a metaphysical *cause* of evolution rather than one operator in the mechanism that explains how species change over time.

For Seiwert, the lasting contribution of this work as a theory of religion is its emphasis on "the role of human emotions in human behavior," and its showing "that religions have a significant share in the cultural shaping of emotions" (235). Though Rue's text clearly blurs the line between studying religion and doing religion, I do not think we should dismiss it simply for that reason. If taken seriously, it presents a valuable point to scholars of religion, especially humanist

scholars, who might see their role and place in the world differently than scientists; that is, in some sense, as guardians of traditions, those who profess the word, voice criticism, and warn against things to come. Myth and theory have always been a bit blurry anyway.

Geertz's chapter tries to draw out a New Atheist theory of religion from Dawkins and Dennett. In complete contrast to the previous chapter on Rue, but similar in methodology, these scholars are not so much interested in a theory of religion, but in a rhetorical project, myth-making to some extent, in order to "disarm" religion (287). Geertz's primary criticism of the scholars is that they are rather ignorant about both religion and the study of religion, that they have bad attitudes that may ultimately be detrimental to their cause, and that they confuse (and equate) negative aspects of being human with negative aspects of religion. With regard to Dennett, he postulates a variety of compelling, empirically testable hypotheses about religion (248–249). For the most part he sees religion as a product of blind replication in the context of the constraints laid out by cognitive science of religion (Boyer, Guthrie, Barrett). Dennett agrees with the line first popularized by Diamond that religion gets rather domesticated in the context of the invention of agriculture and further divisions of labor that allow a steward class to develop. Post-domestication religion is thus "an alliance struck between government leaders and priests... to justify their kleptocracies" (249).

As far as Geertz is concerned, Dennett has a "methodological smugness" about the claims of the cognitive science of religion (251). Geertz asks "after some 150 years of experimental psychology," with a "smattering of brain scans here and fieldwork there — what can we confidently (let alone triumphantly) claim to have explained?" His answer is *not much*; the cognitive science of religion is thus "explanatory interpretation" (Jensen 2003:236)<sup>6</sup> providing "good tools to think with" (251), but not something on which to base smug science.

Dawkins suggests three targets for the evolvability of religion: the group, another individual, and memes (or replicators) themselves. Geertz's main critique of Dawkins is his naive view of pre-modern religions, seeing them as somehow less intelligently designed than modern

<sup>6</sup> Jeppe Sinding Jensen, *The Study of Religion in a New Key* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2003).

ones, such as Scientology (257). Ultimately Geertz does see a cognitive, evolutionary theory of religion possible, and sets out some steps towards it: research on the “cognition of fundamentalism... memory, suggestion, and false beliefs... techniques used in the mind control and socialization of children... the evolution of consciousness... theories of memory, the role of narrative, the development of persons and selves, embodied cognition, extended mind, the chemistry of ritual in general... and the development of language in general” (258).

Stausberg’s chapter is on Riesebrodt’s theory of religion. Riesebrodt attempts to lay out a general (Weberian) theory of religion that elaborates and systematizes the “insider” perspective rather than discounting it. He appears to take considerable issue with those scholars of religion who believe a definition of religion is either not possible, or not advisable, though from Stausberg’s summary it is not clear his argument would satisfy those scholars (265 and note 4). For Riesebrodt, religion is a legitimate category for scholars in the same way as music. A group of people need not have the *concept* of music for scholars to study their music. The same applies to religion (though Stausberg rightly points out in a note that non-Western concepts of music are actually quite distant from our own).

Riesebrodt suggests a number of insightful tools to study religion from this perspective. For example, he has his own helpful criticisms of many of the approaches here under review (267). He usefully distinguishes between four types of discourse on religion: Enlightenment, Romantic, secularization, and postmodern (265). His definition of religion is also theoretically productive. Religion is a response, or coping mechanism (though somehow not functional) in the face of human powerlessness; it is “an anthropology of deficiency”.

Religion is a complex of practices “based on the premise or existence of generally invisible personal or impersonal superhuman powers” (269). Ritual contact is established with these powers in four ways: for laypeople, primarily through interaction and manipulation, and for specialists primarily through fusion and self-empowerment. These “interventionist” rituals are central to his theory of religion, as they logically, emotionally, pragmatically, and systematically ground religious reality (271). He notes two other important practices that are grounded in interventionist practices: discursive and behavior regulating (theology and ethics).

Riesebrodt compares the liturgical structure of these rituals, systematizing them as structures of meaning, and ultimately claiming religion is “primarily a promise of salvation” (272). In this context Riesebrodt offers both a phylogenetic and ontogenetic theory of its emergence. He also distinguishes between religion, religiosity, and religious tradition, arguing that religiosity derives from religion and not the reverse (270). Religious tradition is the broadest category of the three, including broader “ways of life” and “traditional” elements.

Stausberg notes a number of rather serious problems with the approach. First, the theory is ambivalent in that its inductive and deductive methodologies appear to contradict. Riesebrodt wants his anti-functionalist cake and to eat it too. In his inductive mode he is quite critical of functionalism and promotes a Weberian meaning oriented approach to the explanation of religious action, while in his deductive mode he leans toward a functionalism of religious coping. Second, Riesebrodt does not sufficiently engage the literature on super-human agent concepts in the cognitive study of religion (277). This would give him some ground to explain the constraints on such concepts and how they distribute, and also help him relate such concepts to the structure of ritual. Third, Stausberg is skeptical that we should take “religious promises” at face value. He thinks this is rather like taking the advertising promises of modern corporations at face value (278). Fourth, he thinks the theory is too vague, relying on terms such as *Heil* and *Unheil* (in relation to salvation), that are no better than the blurry concepts of *mana*, the sacred, or the holy. Fifth, Stausberg thinks that, though grounded in meaningful data, the “proposed level of... abstraction makes the conclusions derived from the data look disappointingly shallow” (278). In other words, the bargain of taking the insider perspective as our starting point does not exactly pay off, because, in the end we are talking about our theories and not theirs. Thus, on my reading, we become stuck in a rather ‘powerless’ middle ground.

In the conclusion of the volume, Stausberg relates some useful ways to classify the relation between the chapters. The theories can be divided with regard to levels of explanation and their relation, units of explanation, degree of cross-cultural comparison, use of cognitive science, and the particular weighting of the relation between myth (or beliefs) and ritual (or practice).

More specifically, with regard to the content of the theories, he distinguishes between those theories that engage or are receptive to other theories of religion and those that are not. He also notes that the theorists have different ideas about what amounts to a theory. For example, McCauley and Lawson want a testable theory based on general principles, Riesebrodt relies on an “interpretive approach” (285), Stark is deductive, many scholars’ theories are based on evolutionary biology, and finally a few see theory as a form of metaphor making. Most of the theories regard religion as “natural” in some sense, even Dennett and Dawkins, who note that people are naturally “vulnerable” to religion. A further theoretical debate concerns whether religion is a byproduct or an adaptation (with most cognitive theories probably seeing it as a byproduct) and the adequacy of functionalist explanations of religion. In this regard the chapters seem rather equally divided between those that regard functionalism as a legitimate explanation and those that do not. Finally, the theories are further divided into those that are critical of religion and those that are apologies that explicitly try to promote new forms of religion (or atheism).



## Review Essay

### The Serpent of Love Biting Its Western Esoteric Tail

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*Hidden Intercourse. Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism.* Edited by WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF AND JEFFREY J. KRIPAL. (Aries book series, ISSN 1871-1405; v. 7.) Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008. p. cm. Includes Bibliographical references and index. ISBN 978-90-04-16873-2 (hbk.: alk. paper).

... To mingle with the Universe, and feel  
What I can ne’er express, yet cannot all conceal.  
— Lord Byron (George Gordon), *Childe Harold* (IV, 178)

This collection of articles on a complex and provocative subject, bringing together the erotic and the esoteric, constitutes an important contribution not only to the Studies of Religions, but also to the fields of history, psychology and, in particular — even if the title is “The History of Western Esotericism” — that of the study of the encounter between East and West. The book is the fruit of the Second Annual Esoteric Renaissance Conference: Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in Western Esotericism, held in Esalen in April 2005. It consists

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<sup>1)</sup> I am most grateful to Prof. Dr. Maya Burger, University of Lausanne, who asked me to write a review of *Hidden Intercourse*, the themes raised in this publication gave a new turn to my on-going Habilitation research. I thank the editor, Prof. Dr. Olav Hammer, and Thomas Digby in particular, for bringing greater clarity in my non-native English expressions.

of seventeen articles, each raising its own particular questions, and an introduction by the editors entitled “Things We Do Not Talk About” that introduces its global themes.

The editors’ aim in publishing the book is to explore “how and why the two domains of esotericism and eroticism are so intimately interwoven” (x). One of the reasons for the proximity of the two topoi is their similarity in history: both the esoteric and the erotic were “the object of censorship, suppression, concealment, and a certain polite public silence” (ibid.). Esotericism and eroticism also appear to be related to five categories of the unmentionable, namely, *secrecy*, *taboo*, *concealment*, *intimacy*, and *ineffability* (ibid.).

Following the order of the contributions in the volume, we shall briefly review each of them, paying particular attention to the last three which touch on the issue of Western adaptations of Indian *tantric* material.<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to a common preconception regarding Gnostic traditions, the texts analyzed by Roelof van den Broek,<sup>3</sup> whose contribution opens the volume, generally represent a rather “purist” current, in which the perfect god and creator uniting “motherlike” and “fatherlike” aspects of the universe in itself has nothing to do with the concept of an impure and limited body that needs to be kept under the strictest control in order to be able to approach that godhead. In this tradition, androgyny appears to be the most desirable form (5), and this leads to an ambivalent representation of human sexuality: on the one hand the split between the sexes and the resulting sexual desire is necessary but is also the cause of death, as described in the *Poimandres*; on the other hand, as in the *Asclepius*, the union of the two sexes can also be praised as a representation of the androgynous divine, one that must be kept secret.

<sup>2</sup>) By Tantra, I refer to the Western tradition that is seen by the westerners as a unified system. When talking about Indian texts or traditions, I need a plural term: thus *tantras* (as in *tantric* texts) or *tantric* currents. The spelling and transliteration of the non-European terms follow the system proposed in *Hidden Intercourse*; when I quote directly from Sanskrit texts, I follow the standard transliteration for Sanskrit.

<sup>3</sup>) “Sexuality and Sexual Symbolism in Hermetic and Gnostic Thought and Practice (Second-Fourth Centuries),” by R. van den Broek, 1–22.

The Borborites conform better to the image of “unbridled licentiousness” projected onto them by their opponents, and upon all Gnostics regardless of sect by the general public (11). According to Epiphanius, the Borborites, practiced a Eucharistic ritual, “in which instead of bread and wine male semen and female menstrual blood were offered up and eaten by the participants” (12). For this secret group — which even had a particular gesture of recognition — this constituted, according to Epiphanius, the way to collect “power” or “soul” (14). While the existence of a ritual of partaking in bodily fluids is confirmed by sources other than Epiphanius’s *Panarion*, the details of the ritual are in fact a product of the imagination of outsiders based on their misunderstanding of fragments of information relayed to them by devotees.

Another group of Gnostics, the Valentinians, are the subject of April DeConick’s analysis.<sup>4</sup> She notes that the Valentinians defined themselves as Christians, who “through contemplative sexual practices [...] hoped to conceive children whose souls would contain an elect or morally-inclined ‘seed’ of the Spirit” (23). The doctrine of the existence of a select group of human beings bound to be saved and constituting the uppermost echelon of various mutually contradictory systems of classification (such as, for example, one that classified human beings into those whose natures were predominantly constituted by “spirit”, “soul” and “body”) coexisted with a practice of spiritual intercourse controlled by will, not lust. Given that it was commonly accepted among the ancients that the thoughts of future parents during intercourse would determine the nature and even the appearance of the child, the Valentinians believed that it was extremely important to concentrate one’s mind on the Father in order to produce a perfect God-resembling child: a soul fit to be a receptacle of the superior spiritual seed or even to attract an angel from the heavens (42–43).

Pierre Lory’s contribution takes us into the contexts of ancient and modern Islam.<sup>5</sup> The reader is introduced to the domain of *jinns*, a term derived from the root JNN signifying “being covered, dark, unseen”,

<sup>4</sup>) “Conceiving Spirits: The Mystery of Valentinian Sex,” by A. D. DeConick, 23–48.

<sup>5</sup>) “Sexual Intercourse Between Humans and Demons in the Islamic Tradition,” by P. Lory, 49–64.

and here translated as “demons”. Being like humans, but superior in knowledge and speed and having the ability to enter human bodies, *jinn*s became desired partners in magic. Originating in pre-Islamic times and having a very ambiguous position in Islam, the female *jinni* or *jinniyya* are believed to be able not only to come into sexual contact with humans but also to beget children (54–55). Sexual intercourse of this kind is described in terms of possession, which can be either “positive”, when the *jinni* bestow some form of supernatural power (*baraka*) on humans (59), or “negative”, when their victim demonstrates socially unacceptable behaviour.

Elliot Wolfson’s<sup>6</sup> contribution constitutes the first of two articles dealing with medieval Kabbala. The author devotes particular attention to the twin processes of concealing and revealing in the transmission of esoteric knowledge. He then proceeds to discuss the particularities of Kabbalistic language in which “even the gestures of ascetic renunciation [...] are expressions of the erotic” (68). Wolfson attempts to elucidate the reason for the proximity of the esoteric to the erotic, and notes that “intercourse and discourse” are “not only two predominant modalities that structure human experience [...], but also two forms that indicate the nature of the divine being [...]" (68–69). This closeness of the erotic and the esoteric is manifested in the deployment of a mode of the transmission of knowledge that is characterized by particular intimacy — the whisper — and in paradoxical expressions such as “voice of those who utter praise silently” (70). The symbolic alphabetic code serves to hide as much as to reveal. Wolfson sees both whispering and the use of gestures as means of transmission that constitute a compromise between revealing and concealing. But revealing and concealing what? “The secret nature of Eros will be fully exposed in the erotic nature of the secret” (104).

The contribution by Moshe Idel<sup>7</sup> underlines the stable and frequently recurring similarity between the linguistic expressions used to characterize sexual love and those denoting the union with the divine, a resemblance that is especially visible in the terminology related to pleasure. Such linguistic tendencies already appear in early Kabbalistic

<sup>6</sup> “Murmuring Secrets: Eroticism and Esotericism in Medieval Kabbalah,” by E. R. Wolfson, 65–110.

<sup>7</sup> “*Ta’anug*: Erotic Delights from Kabbalah to Hasidism,” by M. Idel, 111–152.

literature and they find their full expression in later Hasidic texts, which explicitly identify the delight of intercourse with delight in the divine (in relation to God and Israel) (119). The current known as “Ecstatic Kabbalah” goes so far as to presuppose that a specific kind of emotionally intense visionary state of consciousness can be achieved in prayer (124). The reader is introduced to the symbolic meanings of key Hebrew words, such as love (125). Later Hasidic sources discuss the possibility of enjoying delight on a permanent basis, but conclude that a permanent delight is not true delight, for this can only be generated by fresh experience (133). Symbolically, transported to a scholastic as well as a cosmic level, the problem is solved by suggesting that the study of the Torah is fresh to the student each day, because God renews creation daily (134). Finally, God appears in the texts as “delight of all delights”, the expression of fullness of mystical experience.

Claire Fanger’s article<sup>8</sup> introduces the reader to the European esoteric texts of the Medieval and Renaissance periods. Fanger proposes Eros as a “test-case” for the articulation of types of human experience as they are mapped onto ideas of divinity (155). Her contribution adds yet another aspect to the relation between the erotic and the esoteric, as love in her source texts is represented as a form of knowing (157). In a text written by a celibate monk, prayer takes the form of a love song, inspired by the Song of Songs, seen as an esoteric system for obtaining knowledge. The Song of Songs, which allegedly hides the esoteric behind the erotic, was used by John of Morigny in his attempt to elevate the material to the spiritual via three stages encoded by three types of kiss.

Taking *Ficino’s De Amore* as his first key source, Wouter J. Hanegraaff,<sup>9</sup> dealing with the same European Renaissance context, masterfully illustrates the contradictions between the two forms of Venus — the “heavenly” and the “vulgar” (180) — and between the “theoretical acceptance of procreation” and the “abhorrence of touching” (183). “Platonic Love,” a term used at first by Ficino (184, n. 32), is opposed to “Socratic Love”, which was understood by his contemporaries as

<sup>8</sup>) “Complications of Eros: The Song of Songs in John of Morigny’s *Liber florum celestis* Doctrine,” by C. Fanger, 153–174.

<sup>9</sup>) “Under the Mantle of Love: The Mystical Eroticism of Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno,” by W. Hanegraaff, 175–208.

having homosexual connotations (186). But while the work as a whole was probably written in order to deal with a personal crisis of love, Ficino also understands the Socratic Love in the sense of a relation that engenders creativity (191–192). The gap between love and sexual desire cannot be overcome in the stories of chivalry, where the woman is venerated by the knight but never touched. Giordano Bruno in his *Eroici Furori* proposes the most radical way out of this dichotomy in his concept of “heroic suffering”, which Hanegraaff calls a “mystical technique” (201) that probably included the acceptance of sexual relations with a woman, while concentrating upon her transcendent archetype, the “eternal feminine” who perfectly reflects the divine light (202 and 204). And yet, concludes Hanegraaff, even in this “heroic practice” the erotic desire is never to be consummated within the domain of senses, corporality and time.

Lawrence M. Principe’s<sup>10</sup> article raises the question of the interrelation of the erotic and the esoteric in Medieval European alchemy, which was permeated with sexual and erotic imagery and language. Principe presents a variety of texts and argues that they demonstrate two simultaneous but opposite desires in their creators: the desires to reveal and to conceal (213). The erotic expressions are metaphorical; they arise from common experience and as such, are not limited to alchemy (*ibid.*). The case of Starkey’s chemical writings is of particular interest being an example of conscious concealing and revealing through “parables”. But what do sexual images and metaphors in alchemy stand for? Numerous interpretations have been proposed in the research on alchemy, the gendered substances and their interactions supposedly encode concepts and practices ranging from the reactions of chemical substances, to various psychic states in Jung’s interpretation (218). Comparing alchemical texts with writings in other non-alchemical domains that employ sexual language, the author convincingly concludes that such erotic language serves as a carefully crafted means of explication, interpretable by those in the know. The obvious male-female duality and union in nature becomes a means of describing dual and opposed yet interacting features of the alchemical

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<sup>10</sup> “Revealing Analogies: The Descriptive and Deceptive Roles of Sexuality and Gender in Latin Alchemy,” by L. M. Principe, 209–229.

world, e.g. that of acids and alkalis. Sexual imagery found in alchemical texts can go well beyond “mainstream” sexual experiences (and depict incest, same-sex couplings, and so forth), but these can easily be understood as an extension of the same metaphorical language.

In the contribution by Allison Coudert, we pass to a discussion of medieval and early modern witches.<sup>11</sup> In early Modern Europe knowledge and curiosity were encouraged in males and represented in females as a sin. The use of the Latin verb *probare* reveals how this gendered understanding translates into the details of language. In one sense, it denotes testing and probing in relation to the world that are proper to men; in another, as torture, it points to the suffering of women. Knowledge (also esoteric) thus intrinsically belongs to men, and when women are deemed to have it, it is represented as “perverse sexual knowledge” (232). In fact, however, this “perverse knowledge” was possessed by theologians, inquisitors, and demonologists, who projected it on witches. But why were women subject to such persecution? There are numerous answers to the question. First, in a world where dual concepts are the predominant mode of thinking (God vs. devil, man vs. woman), the place of women can only be somewhere near that of the devil (234–235). The other important idea is that of complementarity between the sexes, which presupposed that men and women are essentially different and that their lives are determined by the nature of their sex.

A good woman’s life is to be limited to her household, with her concomitant exclusion from the public sphere. Coudert makes an important observation, namely that the medieval representation of witches seemed to include both men and women in equal proportions, while modern representations, in particularly that of witches’ Sabbaths, see witchcraft as something belonging predominantly to women. In their upside-down world, these women are represented as free, dominating, and sexually voracious beings that represent an absolute opposition to the normal, men-dominated order.

For men, a thorough knowledge of the ways of witches would also mean that they knew the opposite side of God, and thereby indirectly

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<sup>11</sup>) “Probing Women and Penetrating Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe,” by A. P. Coudert, 231–280.

that they knew God. This idea is particularly well expressed by Walter Stephens, as cited by Coudert,<sup>12</sup> who represents inquisitors as unbelievers living in a world of shaken concepts, who seek to know the “reality” of God through that of witches and their experiences of the devil. By the period of the witch trials, images of the devil, *succubi* and *incubi*, according to Stephens, become more and more corporeal: these creatures ultimately becoming virtually indistinguishable from humans. The possibility of bodily interaction with these entities was an important idea in the theology of the period (246–247). In these theological speculations, Stephens suggests, the sexual relations of witches with Satan even came to replace the act of witchcraft itself. Coudert qualifies this statement and argues that for the common people the figure of the witch continued to be essentially linked to the power to harm (248). Coudert concludes that it was precisely the sharply dualistic world-vision, expressed in black-and-white pairs of opposites, that led to the creation of the figure of the witch and to the witch trials.

Christian theosophical concepts of the personal and impersonal aspects of Sophia, “Divine Wisdom”, are discussed in an article by Antoine Faivre.<sup>13</sup> Her personal side is particularly developed in the writing of Johann Georg Gichtel, who endows Sophia with such qualities as erotic playfulness, and suggests that the experience of encountering her can be described in orgasmic terms (285). As a result of visionary encounters with Sophia, Gichtel voluntarily abstained from relations with flesh-and-blood women, and was as a result granted mystical knowledge. In his conclusion, Faivre stresses the mediating role assigned to Sophia, a figure intermediate between God and ourselves. Some theosophists stressed her closeness to our human mode of existence, through which they saw her as a concrete person. Gichtel is a case in point: appearing to him from time to time during a period of more than twenty years, Sophia stayed with him for weeks and even participated in his mundane affairs.

<sup>12</sup>) Stephens, Walther. *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

<sup>13</sup>) “Sensuous Relation with Sophia in Christian Theology,” by A. Faivre, 281–308.



Cathy Gutierrez's article is the first of a set dealing with modern and contemporary traditions.<sup>14</sup> Swedenborg's idea that marital relations exist in all species, "from angels to worms," and can develop in two ways, either elevating or degrading the persons concerned so as ultimately to bind them to heaven or hell, was further developed by the spiritualist movement. Spiritualists accepted sex in heavens (hell being abolished, 330), providing a new and positive perspective on the human body. "Improper" sexuality, however, was also possible in the lowest levels of the world of the hereafter. In spiritualist writings, this concept was connected with poverty, ignorance and social injustice rather than sin.

Furthermore, spiritualists held romantic love and conjugal happiness in high esteem. Any deficiencies in these were to be rectified in heaven (320). Celibate souls could not enter some of the celestial temples, as the reception of revelation requires the having of a "soul mate": the other half of two beings constituting completeness (322). Thus, anyone destined to enter heaven must meet their soul mate, if only for a short period of time. The idea of a soul mate was developed further in the Oneida community, where it came to be expressed in the concept of "free marriage" and the equal distribution of love. In the writings of the nineteenth-century spiritualist Victoria Woodhull, the norms of sexuality propounded by mainstream society were represented as sinful and salvation was to be sought through free love (329).

The Oneida community is dealt with in further depth in the contribution of Arthur Versluis,<sup>15</sup> who analyses and compares the three figures who were the main advocates of sexual mysticism in nineteenth-century America. The Oneida community created by John Humphrey Noyes was a kind of laboratory where practices such as communal marriage and *coitus reservatus* were placed in a Christian context. Noyes, Versluis notes, transformed intercourse into "a vehicle of spiritual experience" (334). The second figure to be analyzed in this chapter is Thomas Lake Harris. Claiming to receive information from Swedenborg himself, married to a "Lily Queen" and living with

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<sup>14</sup>) "Deadly Dates: Bodies and Sex in Spiritualist Heavens," by C. Gutierrez, 309–332.

<sup>15</sup>) "Sexual Mysticism in Nineteenth Century America: John Humphrey Noyes, Thomas Lake Harris, and Alice Bunker Stockham," by A. Versluis, 333–354.

another woman in a celibate marriage, this controversial writer expounded on topics such as the existence of “fays” or faeries, the spiritual importance of male-female “counterparts” (338), and the possibility of a “husband-wife joint process of transformation” (341). Harris created the concept of “internal respiration”, a spontaneously arising orgasmic feeling permeating the entire body. As for the more mundane forms of sexual love, even this would in its higher forms generate “mental vigour and bodily strength” in a process that cannot be impeded even by death (347).

The last figure presented in Versluis’s contribution is Alice Bunker Stockham, who, contrary to the two previous cases, did not found a Utopian community but rather contributed through her writings to disseminating the idea that *coitus reservatus* in marriage would usher in a spiritual revolution. Like Harris, Stockham had visited Asia, and more precisely India, but despite a certain affinity with *tantric* ideas Versluis doubts that she could have been initiated into any form of Tantra. In his concluding remarks, Versluis calls all three figures exemplars “of American pragmatist esotericism or esoteric pragmatism.”

The practical and pragmatic aspects of sexual magic are considered in the article by John Patrick Deveney,<sup>16</sup> whose discussion starts with a paradox of early nineteenth-century magic: the second-hand nature of many accounts. Those who wrote books did not have any magical experience, and mediums did not write books. This is the general context in which Paschal Beverly Randolph, medium, visionary and trance speaker, published a number of books describing his own practices. Randolph discovered that the key to all the secrets of the universe lay in sex. Moreover, having tried various techniques from drugs to magic mirrors, Randolph postulated that souls can truly open up to higher dimensions only through simultaneous orgasm (362). He listed 122 powers that can be obtained through sexual magic, the highest being “blending” (363) which he understood as a form of direct, possibly sexual, contact with higher and non-human entities. Deveney notes that Randolph “transformed occultism and magic from antiquarianism to the almost exclusively practical matter that we know today” (365). Even though his works never achieved a wide readership, they

<sup>16</sup> “Paschal Beverly Randolph and Sexual Magic,” by J. P. Deveney, 355–368.

did influence occultists and magicians in Europe and in America, making Randolph one of the founders of sexual magic in the West.

Marco Pasi's article deals with one of the more unusual figures in this collection.<sup>17</sup> Georges Le Clément de Saint-Marcq, freemason, spiritualist and occultist at various periods of his life, was convinced that the secret practices of the Catholic priesthood included the eating of sperm. He made this idea public in 1906, but it was not until 1912, when his book *L'Eucharistie* began to be circulated in Belgium that he became known for a theory that, perhaps unsurprisingly, ended his successful career both in the army and in Masonic circles. According to Le Clément, both Catholics and Protestants lied about the true nature of Eucharist: to his mind, sperm corresponds better to its purpose than the food actually consumed during the Last Supper. The idea would give physical as well as spiritual substance to the apostolic succession. Proclaiming that Jesus transmitted his sperm to his disciples, Le Clément judges this to be quite normal, as all religious traditions prior to Christianity, Eastern and Western, were, in his analysis, doing as much. Christianity represents a turning point, because Jesus made this secret practice public. Le Clément argues that it is not the practice itself that was problematical for the Church but the revelation of the secret. Even if such Eucharistic ritual was, in all probability, never practiced, either by Catholic priests or by Le Clément himself, the idea had a great impact on sexual magic in the O.T.O. (Ordo Templi Orientis) (394) in general, and for Crowley in particular (397). Here, clearly, an esoteric secret is sexual by nature.

The interplay of the esoteric and the sexual reach their climax in the last three articles, which all deal with Western adaptations of Hindu *tantric* traditions and, for this reason, concern a field that appears to be marginal to the issue of "Western esotericism".

Hugh Urban's<sup>18</sup> contribution is concerned predominantly with the sexual nature of Tantra as conceived by westerners and with the influence of Tantra on Western esoteric groups and sexual magic. Searching for a historical connection between Western and Hindu or Buddhist

<sup>17</sup> "The Knight of Spermatophagy: Penetrating the Mysteries of Georges Le Clément de Saint-Marcq," by M. Pasi, 369–400.

<sup>18</sup> "The Yoga of Sex: Tantra, Orientalism, and Sex Magic in the Ordo Templi Orientis," by H. Urban, 401–444.

Tantra, Urban argues that there is only an accidental link (403). “Tantra was a crucial element in the Orientalist imagining of India and a key part of modern imagining of mysticism, particularly in its darkest, most dangerous and aberrant forms” (ibid.). But, continues Urban, “these Western appropriations of Tantra are not so much the product of any actual Indian tradition as they are reflections of the Orientalist fantasies and sexual obsessions of modern Western society itself” (405).

Urban further contrasts Western understanding of Tantra as being predominantly about sex or even liberating sex with the traditional internal *tantric* view, which represents the essence of the tradition as power, *śakti*. Although this power can be magnified through various transgressive practices, including sexual rituals, such practices do not constitute a significant part of the practice (407). The presence of the sexual practice is itself ambiguous: the texts can interpret its symbolic forms, and even where the sex is explicit, its details appear in incredible variety going far beyond the limits attributed to Tantric sex in the West.

Urban draws the main lines of Tantra in the Orientalist imagination from the writings of W. Ward, H. H. Wilson and Sir Monier-Williams, who all contributed to the image of Tantra as black magic and sexual licentiousness, but it was probably E. Sellon who was responsible for the intermixture of Tantra and pornographico-sexological literature in European consciousness. *The Kama Sutra* has been perceived by Europeans as being related to Tantra from the time of Burton’s translation. The later representation of *tantras* as a sort of purified philosophy, proposed by Woodroffe at the beginning of the twentieth century, did not change this misunderstanding.

Urban considered the O.T.O. as one of the most important groups in the transmission of Tantra to the West. Having noted the importance of sexual magic as developed by Randolph before the O.T.O., Urban moves on to the figure of Carl Kellner, who explicitly listed two *tāntrikas* and a sufi among his gurus (418), and who, in collaboration with T. Reuss, sought to include the elements of Hindu Tantra in freemasonry. Kellner appears to have privately practiced some sort of sexual magic, including the manipulation of male and female sexual fluids. But it was Reuss, having discovered the subject from secondary sources, who introduced Tantra as a sex-religion in the O.T.O., where

sexual magic became obligatory practice for the higher degrees of the order. The most infamous of O.T.O. members, credited with bringing together the Eastern and the Western systems of magic (429), Aleister Crowley wrote a great deal about Tantric yoga. His sources, however, were not *tantric* texts, but the English translation of *Shiva Sanhita* (431).

If writing the history of the Western encounter with Indian *tantric* traditions and the reflection of this encounter in the development of European esoteric groups constitutes an important contribution to our knowledge of the field, it is the cross-cultural comparison performed by Urban that raises the most questions. On the basis of unnamed *tantric* texts, Urban discovers that the violation of social laws around ritualized sexual intercourse is a source of magical power common to both Western and Eastern practitioners. It is possible to agree with Urban that ritual transgression is indeed a source of magical power in early *śaiva tantras*, but the mechanism is not direct. It appears to me rather that it is a sudden psychological breakthrough caused by a ritualized manipulation of impure or forbidden substances leading to a particular, duality-devouring state of consciousness that is the source of power in *śaiva tantras*. It is precisely such a state that is identified with the action of *śakti*. Viewed through the prism of altered states of consciousness, traditional *śaiva* and Western interpretations of sexual intercourse as a means of achieving such a state have many more features in common.<sup>19</sup>

The second feature assigned by Urban to both Indian and Western Tantra is its male-oriented character and the use of women as tools in ritual contexts. This is the opinion expressed by Goudriaan thirty years ago, when serious analyses of *tantric* texts were in their infancy.<sup>20</sup> Since then a lot of early *śaiva tantras* have been introduced, and these texts, written between the sixth and the thirteenth centuries A.D. cannot be characterized as misogynist. They retain traces of a system in which the female — the *yoginī* — is advancing through the esoteric hierarchy by various transgressive means about which even the luckiest of the male

<sup>19</sup>) The question shall be further developed in my forthcoming article dealing with the erotic and the esoteric in the *śaiva tantric* texts of the Vidyāpīṭha current.

<sup>20</sup>) Gupta, S., Hoens, D. J. and Goudriaan, T. *Hindu Tantrism*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979, 33–34.

practitioners can only dream. In this ancient system, the highest state is to be achieved by a feminine model. The male *sādhaka*, on the other hand, takes all sorts of precautions so as not to anger the *yoginīs*, serving them for six month or a year in order to obtain teaching. Very far it seems from making “ritualized use” of them.

Although the concept of *yoginī* cannot be limited to real flesh-and-blood women, which does complicate the question, still the feminine model of advancing in practice is clearly perceptible in the early Trika texts, such as the *Siddhayogēśvarīmata* and the *Tantrasadbhāva*, as well as in the *Jayadrathayāmala* and in particular in the Krama texts, which even include the ritual transvestism of the male practitioner. As far as I have been able to ascertain, there is nothing comparable to this *yoginī*-related aspect in Western esoteric traditions.

Urban continues with the differences between Eastern and Western Tantra, which, since the reinterpretation of Reuss, reside in the fact that Western practitioners have misrepresented Tantra as being only concerned with sex. The second important difference concerns the circumscribed character of Eastern *tantric* practice, whose rituals did not challenge the established world-order and stayed secret, while in the West, sexual-magic groups had a tendency to become a means of social and political change (437). Here again, however, the vision of Indian *tantric* traditions as being circumscribed and strictly secret appears, since the recent findings of A. Sanderson, to be outdated. Sanderson has demonstrated the importance of *śaiva tantric* officiants openly acting at the courts of various kings.<sup>21</sup> The other fact that goes against this

<sup>21</sup> Sanderson, A. G. J. S. “The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism during the Early Medieval Period.” In Shingo Einoo (ed.), *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*. Institute of Oriental Culture Special Series 23. Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, 2009, 41–350; “Atharvavedins in Tantric Territory: The Āngirasakalpa Texts of the Oriya Paippalādins and their Connection with the Trika and the Kālikula, with critical editions of the Parājapavidhi, the Parāmantravidhi, and the \*Bhadrakālī-mantravidhiprakarana.” In Arlo Griffiths and Annette Schmiedchen (eds.), *The Atharvaveda and its Paippalāda Śākhā: Historical and Philological Papers on a Vedic Tradition*. Geisteskultur Indiens: Texte und Studien, 11, Indologica Halensis. Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2007, 195–311; “Religion and the State: Śaiva Officiants in the Territory of the Brahmanical Royal Chaplain (with an appendix on the provenance and date of the Netratantra).” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 47 (2004):229–300 (Actual publication date: 2005).

socially passive vision of *tantras* is a late, but relatively important secret group formed around the figure of Aurobindo (according to his letters). This, though modelled upon a *tantric* group, had political and non-ritual aims.<sup>22</sup>

The reader might have wanted to see the Indian side of the problem more developed, but one should note that Urban's representation of the influence of Western imaginings about Tantra on the development of various esoteric groups, the O.T.O. in particular, is important and innovative.

The contribution made to the book by H. T. Hakl<sup>23</sup> stands apart even with regard to the generally high level of the articles presented in it. Using sources practically unknown to the general public, Hakl retraces the history of four magical groups, three of which included *tantric* practices and concepts.

Hakl starts with *Fraternitas Saturni*, an eclectic group, mixing elements from Yoga with Kabbalah and freemasonry (446). It remains unclear whether or not this group practiced some form of sexual magic or only wrote about the possibility that such practice might be able to "break through the astral world and to enter higher mental levels" (447). The practice would require the complete submissiveness of a female partner to a male magus and, among other things, could be used for creating astral beings (448). An extremely interesting variety of Pañcamakāra in Western interpretation (448) required not only the use of the Indian five M's, but also the trance-state of a female medium. Sexual rituals were also used for the activation and development of the *cakras* (449).

A second Italian group, assembled around the figure of Giuliano Kremmerz, is said to be "the most intricate and well-developed among all the magical organization known in the Western world" (450). Its teachings explained how to light a psychic fire through mutual but not consummated attraction between a man and a woman as a means to enter transcendental states (451). The aims of sexual-magical practices were

<sup>22</sup>) *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo. Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, vol. 36. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2006, 177–180.

<sup>23</sup>) "The Theory and Practice of Sexual Magic, Exemplified by Four Magical Groups in the Early Twentieth Century," by H. T. Hakl, 445–478.

mostly mundane, but they included the possibility of achieving a kind of power enabling the conquest of death through the voluntarily separation of the soul from the body — thus, moving the soul into a newly created “glorious body” (457). According to Haki, the aim of this was “to become immortal and godlike.” The idea of immortality and independence from a concrete given body was developed to its ultimate conclusion in *Magia Avatarica*, which taught how to remove a soul from the body of another being and to replace it with one’s own, either temporarily or forever (458). This would also allow the practitioner to live “eternally”.

*Magia Avatarica*<sup>24</sup> can be found on the Net, and although I am not able to judge the question of the provenance or quality of the provided edition, it has to be noted that Indian *tantric* or *yogic* influences are very prominent in the text, including its title. The idea of changing bodies, or penetrating another body is a very ancient Indian practice known under the names *uktrānti* (voluntarily abandonment of one’s own body) and *saṃkrānti* (entering the body of another).

According to the *Magia Avatarica* I read, the entrance into another body requires a particular state of that body achieved either by some sort of natural circumstances or by vampire-like magical procedures, where the “parts” of another being seem to be removed by the practitioner. Although no terminology in this passage allows me to link it to *śaiva tantras*, I think that comparison with the *yoginī*-related procedures is fruitful here,<sup>25</sup> even if the entrance into the body of the other goes through the mouth or nose and not through the opening of the central channel, as in the early *śaiva tantras*. As is the case with the

<sup>24</sup>) Giuliano Kremmerz, *Dossier Segreti di Ermetismo e Alchimia* (edizione ridotta per internet), <http://s.scribd.com/doc/3103615/Dossier-Segreti-G-Kremmerz>; [www.fuocosacro.com/pagine/libri/sputoluna.pdf](http://www.fuocosacro.com/pagine/libri/sputoluna.pdf). I also used the following published edition: Giuliano Kremmerz, *Dossier segreti di ermetismo e alchimia* (a cura di Vittorio Fincati) Carpe Librum, 2nd ed. riveduta Dicembre 2000 della prima edizione apparsa come *Lo Sputo della Luna*, Libreria Editrice Letture S... consigliate, Bassano del Grappa (VI), 1998–1999.

<sup>25</sup>) Serbaeva Saraogi, O. forthcoming. “When to Kill Means to Liberate: Two Types of Rituals in Vidyāpīṭha Texts,” presented at the International Conference at the University of Heidelberg “Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual”, 29 September–2 October 2008. To be published in *Grammar and Morphology of South Asian Rituals* by Harrassowitz in 2010.



*śaiva tantras*, such practices allegedly allow the control of another body, which becomes a sort of “partial incarnation” of the practitioner. Kremmerz talks about “bi-location”. And as in the *tantras*, the process is compared to the mechanism of possession. The second variant of edition of *Magia Avatarica* cites eleven verses of the *Śiva Svarodaya Tantra*. This explicitly sexual passage tells how to seduce and keep a woman under control. The text attributed to Kremmerz further describes the mechanism of the witch attack upon a victim, which appears very similar indeed to the *modus operandi* of the *yoginīs* in early *śaiva tantras*. Moreover, as the practitioner moved up through the degrees of this group, he was supposed to become “possessed” by chosen deities or historical figures, which secured access for him to magical powers, just as in the *śaiva tantras*, the provoked possession by a chosen deity brings *siddhis* to practitioner.

The possible Indian sources of Kremmerz thus require detailed study and it would be interesting to compare his writings with the practices described in the early *śaiva tantras* of the Vidyāpīṭha-type.

The third group discussed by Hakl is the UR that was related to Julius Evola. In his book *The Metaphysics of Sex*, Evola represents sexuality as a religious matter giving sense to human life. Only through sexuality is it still possible to return to the original unity of cosmos and man (462). Or more precisely, it is still possible for man, since woman is “earthbound” and cannot attain transcendence. The magic practiced by the UR group can only partially be called sexual on account of their texts. One of the practices includes the bringing “of a young girl in an altered state of consciousness in which she is to explore the so-called astral world and report what she sees.” The second practice is love represented as opposed to sexual desire, as in this practice a man and a woman sitting in front of each other, achieve a sort of non-bodily union of such intensity “that it cannot be imagined by ‘ordinary’ people” (464). Whatever it might be, the fact that the sexual practices lead to the experiencing of particular states of consciousness in all three groups described should be noted.

The last group discussed by Hakl is the Confrérie de la Flèche d’Or presided by Maria de Nagłowska, who in her books describes a sort of “Satanism,” including life-endangering tests for her disciples, such as hanging them while the rope is to be cut down just before the fatal outcome ensued (472). As for the sexual aspect of her teachings, the

spirit can be redeemed through sexuality. This is a role bestowed on women, who should not know sexual pleasure themselves, but who should selflessly serve humanity by satisfying all men.

Paradoxically, the magical practices described by Hakl and Deveney closely approach those found in the *tantras*, with aspects related to altered states of consciousness that can result in certain cases from sexual practices.

The question of altered states of consciousness being a theme that unites the erotic and the esoteric also emerges in the last article by Kripal.<sup>26</sup> In it he retraces the history of the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. Having described the early years of the community founded by Michael Murphy and Richard Price (a follower of Aurobindo) as well as his own trip to Esalen, Kripal switches to the description of Esalen experiences in terms of “a theology of evolution, a kind of *animan siddhis* or psychic gaze into the microscopic movements of the enlightened body, the Indian identity of *brahman* and *atman*, and a kind of ecological vision of cosmic unity” (485). These terms belong to various religious contexts but describe the states provoked by universal erotic experience uniting the East and the West.

Kripal argues that these Western transformations of Eastern traditions, as he calls them, should be taken seriously by historians of religion, and he sees no reason to give more credibility to Tibetan transformations of Indian *tantric* Buddhism, than to these sometimes unprecedented Western translations of Tantra, Tao and other esoteric currents (487). Citing Zimmer, Kripal seems to suggest that Europeans cannot simply transfer Eastern traditions to the West, but that a new “incarnation from within ourselves” must be found, and thus, essentially, Eastern ideas must be transformed.

Kripal postulates that the basis of the “roar of awakening” of the West in relation to Tantra was scholarly textual transmission through such figures as Avalon, Zimmer, Jung, and Campbell. These figures played important roles in a multifaceted transformation of Tantra within Esalen’s history. Contrary to the scholars mentioned in the article by Urban, who projected their imagination upon Indian traditions and *tantras* in particular, Avalon and others, according to Kripal, knew

<sup>26</sup> “The Roar of Awakening: The Eros of Esalen and the Western Transmission of Tantra,” by J. J. Kripal, 479–520.

much more about India, they travelled and lived there and they seemed to transform Indian traditions consciously. He goes on to define the basis of such transformation in Esalen's history.

For Kripal, the desire to grasp all varieties of the experience, especially altered states of consciousness-related ones, was prominent in Esalen. The general approach also seems all-inclusive — from old traditions to modern science — “a new global gnosis uniting both East and West and mysticism (the subjective soul) and science (the objective cosmos)” (491). In Kripal's argument, the clear-cut distinction between Indian *tantric* texts and traditions and the Western Tantra dissolves. In its place he introduces “a kind of “super-tradition” that run throughout the history of Asian religions, including and especially those Asian religions' recent migrations to American culture” (495). It is as if the place for esoteric merging and re-imagining of various Eastern and Western traditions moved from the centre of encounter that was nineteenth-century Calcutta to twentieth-century Big Sur (501).

In order to allow the reader to feel what the Western Tantra created in Esalen is, Kripal analyses John Heider's short story, *Living in Paradox: A Utopian Soap Opera*, in which sexual experience is transformed paradoxically into a spiritual and sexless one, thus joining not only erotic and esoteric, but also Tantra and Christianity. Another fiction with autobiographical elements, *The ManTantra Letters*, proposes “a sophisticated mystico-erotic theory [...] to explain how Tantric ritual can uncouple desire from its usual objects and so allow it to fly past its target into altered states of consciousness and energy” (509). One of the authors, Victor Bliss (the other being Nathan James), a student of Osho, underlines a fundamental distinction between Yoga and Tantra: “Yoga is the disposition to achieve some ideal state of beings, and Tantra is the counter disposition to arrive at wholeness of fullness” (511). As if to conclude the reflection of the entire book, Kripal cites Bliss who states that “sexuality becomes an expression of the spirit, and the spirit becomes an expression of sexuality” (512).

Paradoxically, Kripal describes “Holistic sexuality” and the idea of immanence propagated in Esalen as essentially different from Asian Tantra, as he considers the latter to be the search for transcendental gods, a tradition where sexual intercourse is used “to propel consciousness into expanded or transcendent states of disembodiment” (513). Unfortunately, Kripal does not name any *tantric* text or tradition

which he believes would hold such a view. Taken as a general statement, it is imprecise and incorrect. The Krama school, for example, which deeply influenced the writings of Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja, takes immanency and “this-worldliness” to be the next level upwards from transcendence. The *śaiva tantric* techniques of provoked possession (*āveśa*), all related to the problematics of those altered states of consciousness cherished by Kripal, also seem to drag the highest deities into the very human body. Unfortunately, it is possible to observe a gap between the textual studies of *tantras* done by Sanderson and others, on the one hand, and Science of Religions’ approach to *tantric* material on the other.

Urban’s, Hakl’s and Kripal’s articles dealing with Tantra, straddling the border between the Western and the Eastern, raise questions about the most fundamental categories employed throughout the book. First and foremost of these would be the definition of Western esotericism that appears in the book’s sub-title. In what exactly does Western esotericism consist? Is it a set of traditions rooted in Christianity, or in Europe and America more generally? Or is it a scientific approach that allows the study of Eastern material as well?

A related problem is the definition throughout the book of Western esotericism without any reference to a probable “Eastern” counterpart, except for Kripal’s idea of representing Tantra as the term for Asian esotericism (496). Would “Eastern” esotericism, if such a thing existed, imply no more than an esotericism independent from the Western set of historical traditions or would it be something different in quality? A new and self-determining approach? This question demands an independent investigation; and precisely this analysis is the subject of my forthcoming article dealing with the theoretical possibility of an Asia-centric approach to esoteric material.

Moving from theoretical to practical questions, one might well ask if it would be possible to locate the five transversal categories encoding the interrelations of the erotic and the esoteric as listed by the editors in the introduction to the non-Western material. On the basis of the Vidyāpīṭha *śaiva tantras* it is already possible to state, as an example, that the attitude towards personal experience or understanding of the role of the partners in sexual practice would be very different from that which is presented in relation to *tantras* in the articles contained in *Hidden Intercourse*.

## Book Reviews

*Sacred Schisms: How Religions Divide*. Edited by JAMES R. LEWIS AND SARAH M. LEWIS. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. xi + 338 pp., with 5 figures and Index. ISBN 978-0-521-88147-0.

*Sacred Schisms: How Religions Divide* defines its scope in terms of offering the “first book-length study of religious schisms as a general phenomenon”. It comprises some theoretical discussion (Introduction and Part 1 Theoretical Overview), and thirteen case studies of schisms in different traditions and settings. These case studies are grouped under the headings “Survey of Schisms in Selected Traditions” (Part 2), “Christian Traditions” (Part 3), “Western Esoteric Traditions” (Part 4), and “Non-Western/Postcolonial Traditions” (Part 5). They range widely from theosophy to Japanese new religious movements, and across time from Catholic Christianity during the Roman Empire to the recent history of Transcendental Meditation in North America.

The editors, James Lewis and Sarah Lewis, note in their Introduction that, although the use of the term “schism” is not confined to religious phenomena, it is most commonly found in religious contexts. Their definition of “schism” centres on the breakaway of groups, as distinct from the movements of individuals, typically from a larger organisation to create new organisations. They recognise that, because of the negative connotations of conflict attached to “schism”, this is a term breakaway groups are unlikely to adopt when characterising themselves. As Roger Finke and Christopher Scheitle caution later in the volume (12), there is a danger that the manifest drama of a schism may distract attention from its latent causes. Taking the example of a schism within a small Baptist church in North Carolina, triggered on the surface by a dispute over ice cream socials on Sundays, James Lewis and Sarah Lewis stress the need to examine the sometimes less obvious and often far more complex causes of religious schism. Having alluded to “the general poverty of current ‘schism theory’” (2), they propose a preliminary typology of schisms based on different explanatory factors, including personal ambition, doctrinal disagreements, and ethnic and national differences (2f.). The major responsibility for developing a theoretical component in the volume,

however, falls to Finke and Scheitle, the authors of the first chapter, which constitutes Part 1 of the book.

Finke and Scheitle utilise organisational and religious economy theories to address limitations they identify in H. Richard Niebuhr's work on schism, which "was the first to inject theoretical life to the process of schism formation" (11). This highlights a challenge facing the volume's contributors, given that their aim is to offer a treatment of "religious schisms as a general phenomenon"; namely, the extent to which earlier theory has been developed largely with reference to institutionalised forms of Christianity in Western Europe and North America. Rather than following Niebuhr's reliance on explanations based on class interests, Finke and Scheitle emphasise the need to derive explanations of schism from a variety of historical and structural forces. In seeking factors that promote or deter schisms, they examine the religious market and ecological spaces, including the role of state regulation in, for example, nineteenth-century America and post-World War II Japan. Such regulation, as Murphy Pizza (259) points out, has continued to lead some movements to resort to schism as a tactic when negotiating matters relating to legal status. Acknowledging the importance of analyses of differences between church and sect in theoretical understandings of schisms, Finke and Scheitle favour as their starting point a model that treats church and sect as organisations on a continuum, rather than emphasising their differences through typological analysis. Shifting the focus from the religious groups to the demand that underlies their diversity, Finke and Scheitle incorporate research suggesting that the distribution of individuals' preferences for more intense forms of religion approximate to a bell-shaped curve in which the majority are attracted to moderate and conservative "religious niches". It is the ever-present diversity of demand that creates distinctive "religious niches", which, Finke and Scheitle argue, are central to understanding the origins of schisms (16), as, for example, when niches are "stretched" and increasing heterogeneity leads to conflict.

Authors of the individual case studies introduce a variety of theoretical analyses in the course of their arguments. Several refer to Max Weber's theory of institutionalisation, coupled with Thomas O'Dea's "paradoxes of institutionalisation" (Ron Geaves, 59f.; George Chryssides, 110f.; David Bromley and Rachel Bobbitt, 219), and Olav Hammer (200) draws on Colin Campbell's concept of the "cultic milieu", as does Jesper Aagaard Petersen (219–222) in his examination of definitions of "cult" and "sect". Yet, the authors of the case studies do not appear to take a collective responsibility for explicitly testing and developing the theoretical elements of the early sections of the volume. Only Murphy Pizza (251) refers directly to the theoretical issues

raised in Part 1, specifically, the notion of a niche being stretched, although Finke's work is also cited by E. Burke Rochford (292). Thus, while some of the case studies explicitly identify and explore in a sustained manner methodological and theoretical problems encountered in their particular case study of schism, others offer broader, historical accounts of the tradition in question or a "founder" or comparable figure. There is throughout, however, a determination to avoid explanations that deal with the surface of schisms, and to look beyond personality clashes and power struggles between individuals (Susan J. Palmer and Michael Abravanel, 188) in order to encompass structural conditions and socio-psychological factors, such as those that encourage rival groups to polarise ever more sharply and antagonistically (cf. Bryant, 154ff.; Petersen, 219f.).

Questions raised by individual authors within the case studies, in some instances recurrently, about the nature of "schism" in a variety of contexts, are suggestive of a developing critical agenda. Alan Cole (61), for example, having noted in his essay that the "history of Buddhism... could be told as a series of schismatic developments" (cf. Petersen on modern Satanism, 219), advocates a broad definition of "schism" as a "publicly recognised division within a religious group", including clandestine mini-groups that recognise their own distinctiveness within a larger group. This perspective on "schism" as part of a dynamic integral to the development and proliferation of religious traditions, and even necessary for their survival, is echoed by other contributors to the volume. Joseph Bryant (150), for example, argues that the Decian persecution of the Christian church during the 3rd century CE "precipitated a schismatic rupture within the Church that would greatly enhance its prospects for eventual triumph in the reign of Constantine." Murphy Pizza (251) refers to the benefits of schism for community-building in her chapter on schism as "midwife" in contemporary Paganism. Noting that there is "a fine line between religious schisms and a religion's natural growth" (259), she concludes her study of the schismatic origins of the Wiccan Church of Minnesota with the observation that schism here has come to be recognised as a catalyst for growth, rather than as a sign of failure (260). Treating the kinds of change associated with the term "schism" as indicative of failure is also rejected by Rochford (282) in his study of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (the "Hare Krishna movement"), where he argues that such changes are suggestive of the fluid nature of social movements. "Schism" on this understanding is hard to separate from dissent, which is part of almost all religions (Hammer, 215), and innovation (Petersen, 221).

Some of the problems surrounding the use of "schism" are not unlike those identified in scholarly discussion of the concept of "syncretism", which in

some of its uses has had a markedly polemical tone. The reflective strand running through several of the essays would appear to raise, but not to pursue, the question of the usefulness of the notion of “schism”, dependent upon its being disentangled from theological judgements rooted in ideals of unified religious communities and institutions. Indeed, its use in emic sources has been closely associated with the post-event retrospection of those who have achieved power or supremacy (cf. Cole, 66 and Chryssides, 109). Perhaps, the “dramatic” quality of the term, the frequently theologised and often negative connotations that previously have been attached to it, does suggest that its use may serve to distract attention from the distinctive historical processes, and the external structural factors, which shape the development of religious traditions, with all their internal diversity. If, however, the term “schism” is to be refined as a critical term in the study of religions in order to generate a body of theory that will facilitate the study of schism as a “general phenomenon”, then clearly it will be important to test the kind of terminology that would be most appropriate for a cross-cultural application. Geaves (38), for example, takes a step in this direction in his examination of Qur’anic terminology indicative of degrees of dissent and factionalism prior to analysing the causes of schism in the *ummah*.

With its rich and interesting selection of case studies and introductory perspective on current theory concerning the causes of schisms, *Sacred Schisms: How Religions Divide* undoubtedly justifies its claim to have approached schism as a general, religious phenomenon. In this respect, it may prove to be a volume to which, as the editors hope, future scholars working on schism will return. Whether the structure of the book as a whole enables it to make an integrated and distinctive contribution to the advancement of “schism theory” is more open to question. For example, the editors’ Introduction is surprisingly brief (8 pages), given the wide range of studies encompassed by this collection of essays and the acknowledged “poverty” of theory that the contributors seek to redress. It provides useful previews of the authors’ concerns, but offers only a limited explanation of the rationale behind the collection of essays, the reasons for the selection of the case studies (whether in terms of their role in illustrating a specific aspect of the history of schism within a religious tradition or furthering the volume’s methodological agenda). Thus, it remains unclear why overview surveys are offered of some traditions and not others, and why Christian traditions require examination in a separate Part. The use of the categories “Western” and “non-Western/postcolonial” may also prove problematic for those who do not define their areas of interest in relation to some construction of “the West”. Consequently, readers may find the critical direction of the volume becoming evermore dif-



fuse, rather than tending towards a collective and concerted reflection on an agenda established in the Introduction and Part I. Certainly, the absence of a critical conclusion largely leaves to the reader the task of pulling together the volume's insights into both the nature of religious schism as a general phenomenon and how best to approach it.

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*Claude Lévi-Strauss on Religion. The Structuring Mind.* By PAUL-FRANÇOIS TREMLETT. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2008. 121 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-84553-278-9.

The book is a model of clarity in organisation and exposition. After an introduction “An intellectual biography”, four chapters examine the great structuralist works which, taking cues from linguistics, promised “a true and total science of humankind”. The “polluting” interaction of face to face field work is eschewed. Change is analysed along synchronic axes; thus the symbolic systems used to communicate information become apparent. Searching law rather than meaning, Lévi-Strauss could credibly maintain that his books on kinship systems, totemism and mythology wrote themselves. The author maintains that, in spite of the attempt in *La pensée sauvage*, the structuralist anthropology is incapable of asking questions that are properly socio-logical.

A crucial chapter turns to “The structure of nostalgia”; here we read of *Tristes Tropiques*, the literary masterpiece that, deservedly, gave Lévi-Strauss a wide and enduring audience. Here as in the various advocacies espoused by Lévi-Strauss, we see the towering influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Global hegemony has been established and it rests on force not on consent. We must agree with Tremlett, that Lévi-Strauss does not wrestle intellectually, politically, with ethnocide; he mourns it. Derrida even concluded that the scholar reproduced the ethnocentrism he reacted against.

Tremlett’s book is rich in bibliographic references and students will find an excellent introduction to the epoch-making structural findings and to the current state of the question. The proper stature of the book is reached when the achievement of Lévi-Strauss is examined for its contribution “to the study of religion audience”. Weaknesses are pointed out. To build a view of the kinship systems on the basis of a principle of the scarcity of women ignores the proverbial wisdom that says a good man is hard to find. There is something distressing in seeing a giant mind being romantic about Buddhism and crudely negative about Islam. Still, Lévi Strauss was at his greatest when he wrote *Tristes Tropiques*, even though he “sinned against science” in so doing. (In a similar manner Tremlett wrote an intellectual biography for a scholar who disavowed the role of biography in science.) The search for meaning, the core of the perennial rival school, namely the phenomenology of religion, could not be silenced. The agenda of a theory of religion is strengthened by Tremlett. Language does not only serve the ends of science, but also the needs of constructing social relationships in the midst of diachronic changes. I can

only deplore that Tremlett did not seize the opportunity of saying more, beside affirming that theorizing about theory requires antagonistic thinking.

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*Parsis in India and the Diaspora*. Edited by JOHN R. HINNELLS AND ALAN WILLIAMS, Routledge South Asian Religion Series. London, New York: Routledge, 2007. xiv + 290 pp. ISBN 978-0415443661.

The volume under review is a collection of essays presented at a research workshop organised by John R. Hinnells and held at the School of Oriental and African Studies in 2006. Its objective is to reach out beyond Zoroastrian Studies and benefit a wider range of disciplines, from history of religions and diaspora studies, to the history of South Asia, colonialism, and post-colonialism (4). The twelve contributions are divided into three parts, each covering an epoch of Parsi history: the settlement in India, the nineteenth and the twentieth century. Thus the collection spans “five centuries of history” (ix). The chapters represent distinct, long-term research projects, and do not offer broad surveys, instead they magnify and present their subjects in copious detail (4).

Alan Williams, “The Structure, Significance and Poetic Integrity of the *Qesse-ye Sanjān*” (15–34), who later joined as co-editor, previews his at the time still forthcoming edition of the *Qesse-ye Sanjān* (QS),<sup>1</sup> offering a fresh and at times challenging interpretation of the text, a “late sixteenth-century Zoroastrian” poem in New Persian (15). The QS recounts the story of the Zoroastrians’ migration from Iran to India. While Williams acknowledges the text’s past reception, he challenges the common perception of the QS as a historical record and views it instead as a “religious work” (18) with an authorial intention (33) to “articulate a collective memory” (17). He asserts that the key to understanding the QS lies in its compositional structure (18), suggesting that it is partly reflective of the Zoroastrian three-fold division of history in “Creation” (*bundahišn*), “Mixture” (*gumēzišn*) and “Resolution” (*wizārišn*) (24).

In “The Landing of the Zoroastrians at Sanjan” (35–58), Rukshana Nanji and Homi Dhalla examine the archaeological evidence for the arrival of the Parsis in India. The excavations were undertaken “with the intention of evaluating the historical veracity of the *Qesse-ye Sanjan*” (35). The material evidence seems to confirm a Zoroastrian presence in Sanjan as early as mid-eighth century to late thirteenth century (54), and the authors suggest that the community’s migration to India and subsequent moves within the

<sup>1</sup>) Now published: Williams, Alan. 2009. *The Zoroastrian Myth of Migration from Iran and Settlement in the Indian Diaspora. Text, Translation and Analysis of the 16th Century Qesse-ye Sanjān ‘The Story of Sanjan’* (Numen Book Series, Text and Sources in the History of Religions 124). Leiden & Boston: Brill.

sub-continent may have been motivated by commercial interests as well as invasions and religious persecution (51, 53). The find of jewelry at the *dokhma* (“Tower of Silence”) sheds light on aspects of Parsi funerary rites contrasting the present practice of removing these from the deceased (42). Moreover, the recovery of jewelry with the same type of metal mixture both *in situ* at the *dokhma* and in the settlement, suggests a link between both locations (42). Echoing assertions of the first chapter, the authors argue that the “idea that a ship-load of migrants buffeted by the winds was tossed ashore at Sanjan by sheer chance needs to be recognized as a myth” (53).

In “Parsi Prayer and Devotional Song in the Indian Diaspora” (59–77), Sarah Stewart examines the oral textual legacy of the Parsis, with particular attention to devotional songs of the laity. Her introduction offers a general overview of Zoroastrian and Parsi prayers, before turning to the *Atash nu Git* or “The Song of the Fire”, a layman’s devotional song composed to celebrate the “founding of the second *Atash Bahram* in India in 1765” (66). In comparing different versions of the *Atash nu Git*, she identifies compositional features typical of oral compositions, but also describes motifs known from other Zoroastrian texts, thus contextualising the song within the Zoroastrian tradition. She argues that the *Atash nu Git* “is not just a festive song, but also a prayer, an act of worship and a ritual performance” (67). Though Stewart focuses on a particular song, she offers thoughtful reflections on the nature of prayer, ritual and observance in Parsi tradition and their scholarly reception in the West.

Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, a successful merchant, philanthropist and “leader of the Parsi community”, played an instrumental role in shaping urban public culture in Bombay (83). Jesse S. Palsetia draws on his biography in “Partner in Empire. Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy and the Public Culture of Nineteenth-century Bombay” (81–99), to explore the dynamic of cooperation between the British colonial power and the Indian elite. He argues that by collaborating with the British, the notables “aimed at the creation of a colonial civic culture receptive and sensitive to Indian requirements” (82). To that end, the partnership required the recognition of British authority by the Indian elite (83), but more notably a new setting which would foster a “cooperative socio-political dynamic” (84), namely urban Bombay. By adopting Western, non-religious public charity as a tool, the Indian elite gained recognition and influence among the British (87), while also catering to Indian requirements through contributions to educational and health organisations. Jejeebhoy did not limit his charitable projects to the Parsi community and thus played a crucial role in changing the “political landscape of Bombay and Western India” (91).

Surveying the history of the community's religious disputes, John R. Hinnells, "Changing perceptions of authority among Parsis in British India" (100–118), concludes that the notion of authority is "somewhat chaotic" among the Parsis (115). He highlights two key features of the changing notion of authority: firstly, the frequent transfer of authority between locations (from Navsari to Bombay), families (from the Wadias through to the Adenwallas) and institutions (from the Panchayet to the Anjuman to the courts of law) (115); secondly, the recourse to external authorities or courts to resolve religious disputes (103, 105, 107, 109). Urbanisation emerges as one of the most powerful agents of social change among the Parsis (111). Hinnells also reviews the disciplining of priests (*dasturs*), "a rarely discussed feature of Parsi religious authority" (111), by institutions such as the Anjuman or by members of the community in form of protests (111–113). He concludes by observing that the "contemporary community has no clear concept of authority" (116).

Based on a review of Parsi business activities (119–128), Rusheed R. Wadia, "Bombay Parsi Merchants in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" (119–135), seeks to draw a link between community identity and Parsi business practices of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Examples include close cooperation between Parsi merchants (125–126), business related inter-marriage (126) and the establishment and survival of family businesses despite rising changes in ownership patterns (127). He further asserts that both external and internal socio-political factors affected the formation of the community. Some cited instances include the government-sanctioned killing of stray dogs, Christian missionary activities, building regulations close to the Parsi funerary ground and an "emergent Parsi journalism" (129–130).

John McLeod, "Mourning, Philanthropy, and M. M. Bhownaggee's Road to Parliament" (136–155), illuminates the coincidental circumstances that led to Bhownaggee's election to the British Parliament in 1895. To fight despair after the unexpected loss of his young sister, Bhownaggee, a community leader and a cabinet minister in Gujarat, launched a series of memorial projects to commemorate her death (137, 138). The failure of his main project in Bombay, a memorial hall, diverted his attention to London where he financed a corridor at the Imperial Institute in memory of his sister (148). McLeod argues that the failure of Bhownaggee's memorial hall project in India, his amalgamate style of mourning, which incorporated elements from both Parsi and Victorian traditions, and his devotion to the idea of the Empire combined to shift his attention from India to London, eventually paving the way for his political engagement and success.

In “Judging Conversion to Zoroastrianism: Behind the Scenes of the Parsi Panchayat Case (1908)” (159–180), Mitra Sharafi examines a judicial case concerning the conversion of Suzanne Brière to Zoroastrianism. The Parsi judge D. Davar and his British colleague, F. Beaman, considered permitting limited conversion in the first phase of the hearings but later “adopted an anti-conversion stance” (161 & 165). Sharafi attributes Davar’s change of mind to the testimony of the prominent scholar-priest J. J. Modi who acted as an expert witness in the hearings (165). However, Beaman’s previously unexamined judgement notebook, consulted by Sharafi for the first time, reveals that he questioned Modi’s credibility as a witness and disliked him “intensely” (165). Despite this scepticism, Beaman later supported Davar’s judgement. Sharafi argues that Beaman deferred to Davar’s judgement because Davar was senior to him on several counts (172). Most significantly, she contextualises the Parsi Panchayat case within the wider backdrop of colonialism in India, arguing that Beaman concurred with Davar to preserve the authority of the colonial court at a time when South Asians were setting out to dominate the judicial system (173–174).

“Iranians and Indians on the Shores of Serendib (Sri Lanka)” (181–210) by Jamsheed K. Choksy is a detailed historical account of Iranian, Zoroastrian and Parsi presence in Sri Lanka for more than two millennia. He identifies three phases of settlement by Iranian and Indian Zoroastrians: “from Antiquity into Middle Ages”, “from 1600 into the late 1700s” and “from the late 1700s to the present” (206). The first recorded arrival of Iranians in Sri Lanka dates to Darius I, who ruled 522–486 BCE (183). Choksy aligns his survey with Sri Lanka’s political history and focuses on the era beginning with the British colonial rule (189–206), during which time Parsis settled in Sri Lanka and prospered in their commercial endeavours, including ship building, transportation of commercial goods, tea and coffee trade, education, textile and entertainment. In a survey of religious practices (195–204) Choksy suggests that the Parsis had to adapt religious customs to accommodate their circumstances, resulting, for instance, in a relaxation of purity laws (199) or the funerary customs (202). Despite forming a minuscule percentage of the population, 0.0003256 according to a 2001 census (204), Parsis have played a significant role in the economic history of Sri Lanka.

In “Zoroastrians in Europe 1976 to 2003: Continuity and Change” (211–235), Gillian M. T. Mehta updates research conducted in 1976 and 1985 on Zoroastrians in Europe. The 2003 questionnaire survey paid particular attention to purity laws, primarily those “rules governing women and menstruation” (212). It emerges that Zoroastrian women more staunchly support the observance of purity laws than men (227). The data also reveals that

“demographic attributes” (217) such as education, age, marital status and location of residence are contributing factors to the respondents’ attitude towards purity laws. For instance, the women who rejected purity laws were European-educated, young professionals with a greater tendency to marry outside the community (217). Parsi women arriving from Africa, Pakistan, and India supported purity laws, whereas Iranian Zoroastrians consistently rejected them (221).

In “Para-Zoroastrianisms: Memetic Transmission and Appropriations” (236–254), Michael Stausberg discusses seven non-ethnic adaptations of Zoroastrian religious characteristics by *others*. Spread by memetic transmission, he argues, the “subsequent reconfigurations” (238) of the “religious ‘memes’” equal ‘religious innovation’ outside the self-defined boundaries of religious communities” (251). Stausberg suggests that memes spread through interaction (251) and can include features such as the notion of authority and authorship in the textual domain (Sketch 1: 238–241). Likewise, religious movements make use of a wide range of features such as name, prayers, ritual and history. The Mazdaznan movement (Sketch 2), promoted by Ottoman Hanish in late nineteenth century in Chicago and California (242), for instance, makes use of the name (Middle Persian *māzdēsnañ*) as well as prayers and mythology, while the movement considers itself to be “the authentic original Zoroastrianism” (244). Other movements and personalities discussed by Stausberg include Dastur Sraosha Kaul (Sketch 3), the International Mazdayasnan Order (Sketch 4), California based The Zarathushtrian Assembly (Sketch 5), the former Swedish pop star and celebrity Alexander Bard (Sketch 6) and the Russian Avestan Schools of Astrology lead by Pavel Globa (Sketch 7).

The volume concludes with a survey of recent Parsi history and diaspora by John R. Hinnells, “Parsis in India and the Diaspora in the Twentieth Century and Beyond” (255–276). He asserts that Parsi social, political and economic power extends beyond the golden age of the nineteenth century by offering a “bird’s eye view of modern [Parsi] history” since 1906 (256). He includes a review of prominent Parsis’ contributions in the fields of politics, professions and industries, sports as well as arts and sciences. He then turns attention to the religious sphere by briefly outlining the development of the “Parsi version of Theosophy, Ilm-i Khshnoom” (263) before continuing with brief sketches of the reformist Dastur Dhalla (263) and the conservative Khojaste Mistree (264). The final sections are devoted to the diasporas of the twenty-first century and the challenges they face, such as intermarriage (265), transmitting Zoroastrian identity to the younger generation (268), religious adaptation and change in view of new circumstances (269) and encounters



between Iranian Zoroastrians and Parsis in the diaspora (269). An overview of the relatively young Australian diaspora (270) is followed by a section outlining the efforts and conflicts in forming a Zoroastrian world body (271). To conclude, Hinnells observes that “[d]eclining numbers have not prevented the last hundred years from being a time of achievement, dynamism and change for Parsi Zoroastrians” (274).

In a recent review of the field, Stausberg (2008:566) has rightly noted the marginalisation of Zoroastrian Studies over the past several decades.<sup>2</sup> A notable exception, also in his view, is the study of Parsis in India and particularly in the diaspora, which is “the lasting merit of John Hinnells” (Stausberg 2008:583). It is also to Hinnells’s credit to have brought together a diverse set of researchers whose interdisciplinary approach in *Parsis in India and the Diaspora* captures the field’s emergent dynamism. The essays more than measure up to the volume’s objective and it is hoped that by opening doors to other academic disciplines, Zoroastrian Studies can overcome its marginalisation.

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<sup>2</sup>) Stausberg, Michael. 2008. “On the State and Prospects of the Study of Zoroastrianism.” *Numen* 55:561–600.

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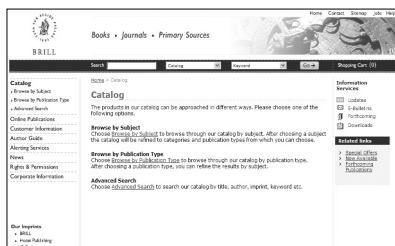
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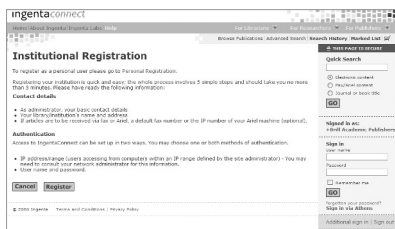
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BRILL

## Introduction

### *Pars pro toto: On Comparing Relic Practices*<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

This article examines some of the implications of cross-cultural and cross-tradition comparison in the study of religion as they emerge from an analysis of religious practices associated with relics. It also identifies some key comparative themes highlighted in the articles that comprise this special issue on relic practices.

#### Keywords

relics, comparative religion, materiality, ritual, textualization

Thus I find a comic stance empowering, both as a historian and as a human being. Why not take the notion of digested and regurgitated fragments as a metaphor for the historian's subject matter? And why not — whatever despair we may feel concerning resurrection and reassemblage — find comic relief in the human determination to assert wholeness in the face of inevitable decay and fragmentation? (Bynum 1991:26)

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<sup>1</sup>) I would like to thank my colleagues in the UVM Religion Department for their comments on an earlier version of this introduction, in particular, Anne Clark and William Paden. I am also grateful to Kimberley Patton and Tracy Pintchman, co-chairs of the American Academy of Religion Comparative Studies in Religion Section, for facilitating the organization of a panel on “Relic Practices across Traditions” at the 2009 AAR Annual Meeting in Montréal in which material from several of the articles included in this collection was presented.

## Introduction

What do we mean by a *relic*? There are many fruitful ways to approach this question. We can, for example, trace the etymology of the English word, mapping its web of meanings through time, and compare its semantic range with words that appear analogous in texts that describe relics and their related practices. Gregory Schopen has done this for Buddhist Sanskrit texts, noting that the two relevant Sanskrit terms differ markedly in their meanings: in the case of one term, *śarīra*, death and cremation mark the transition from “body” to “bodies” (or from “corpse” to “corporeal remains”), while in the case of the other term, *dhātu*, death and cremation transform the deceased’s body into its essence.<sup>2</sup> Though these two words seem to point in opposite directions, one suggesting a transformation entailing the multiplication of parts and the other a process of concentration through which the body’s essence is made manifest, the two words taken together suggest that one meaning of Buddhist relics as represented in this literature points to the centrality of the relationship between multiplicity and unity, or parts and wholes, and hence the overarching theme of this essay: *pars pro toto*, “part representing whole.”

The opening quotation from Caroline Bynum comes from her collection of essays entitled *Fragmentation and Redemption*, a work that explores how relics have likewise engaged medieval Christians in practices that addressed fundamental questions of bodily fragmentation and decay. These threats to human integrity took on a particular set of valences when viewed against the Christian doctrines of God’s incarnation in Christ and Christ’s death and resurrection, events that for those Christians prefigured their own bodily resurrection upon Christ’s return. And, following Bynum’s lead, we can also begin to appreciate the promise that the study of relic practices holds for advancing our own reflections on the study of religion and, in particular, the nature of comparison. For, as Bynum notes, the work of historians and, I would say, of scholars of religion more generally, has much to do with the collection, organization, and analysis of fragmentary traces of human activity, and with discerning how and to what extent those necessarily limited fragments can be allowed to speak for wholes,

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<sup>2</sup> The analogous words in Pāli Buddhist texts are *sarīra* and *dhātu*.

whether these be persons, societies, cultures, or even what we call religions.

To return to my opening question, inflected somewhat differently: what do *we* mean by a relic? The “we” in this sentence can be taken to refer to scholars of religion, a group comprised of individuals who approach their subject from a broad spectrum of methodological and theoretical positions. Much has been made of an alleged sea change in the study of religion from a discipline focused on the analysis of authoritative texts to one in which embodied practices hold center ground, a contrast sometimes aligned with a shift in focus from the idealized representations of religious elites to the study of religion as practiced by ordinary people in their daily lives. As the essays in this issue attest, the study of relic practices provides a useful vantage point from which to reflect upon some of these tensions in the field.<sup>3</sup> The five contributors to this collection are situated in a multiplicity of disciplinary settings, including departments of religion, history, Asian studies, and art history, and their sources are likewise diverse, drawing upon canonical and noncanonical texts, artefacts, archival sources, and interviews with contemporary practitioners. Taken together, their essays suggest that an understanding of relic practices leads us beyond simple dichotomies such as text vs. practice or elite vs. popular religion. As these essays attest, the material remains that have been the focus of relic practices are often deeply textualized; relics seem frequently to enable the generation of accounts that trace their movement from time to time and place to place, and these accounts in turn serve to authorize the relics’ authenticity and power. While these textual accounts are frequently composed by religious elites, they nevertheless commonly testify to the deep complementarity of roles played by religious elites and ordinary people, and to the impact that relic practices have had on the contours of lived religion.

The contributors’ essays also represent a variety of religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Jainism. The implications of this selection call forth another dimension of the part/whole relationship. The study of religious traditions forms a long-standing intellectual

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<sup>3</sup>) Peter Brown’s critique of the “two-tiered” model of religion and its consequences for the study of Christian relic practices has been very influential; see Brown 1981:17–22.

orientation of departments of religion. In my department, for example, “traditions” courses are a major part of the introductory- and intermediate-level curriculum. However much individual instructors often work to deconstruct the idea of clearly bounded religions, each presumed to possess its own distinctive set of beliefs and practices, as well as its own unique history, the deep structure of the curriculum, as well as popular ideas about world religions, reinforce a particular construction of knowledge in which discrete religions play a formative role. The study of religion, in the singular, likewise participates in this distinctive form of knowledge construction, in which knowledge of religion is explicitly or implicitly understood to emerge from a broad base of knowledge about specific religions (and the more traditions the better), or through the understanding of deeper patterns that are taken to be constitutive of the genus religion, of which particular religions are examples.<sup>4</sup> But as many scholars have noted, these reified religions, like the category of religion itself, are products of a particular lineage of modern Euro-American scholarship, one with powerful ideological entailments.<sup>5</sup> One of these entailments is the tendency to prefer wholes to parts, i.e., to highlight patterns of similarity and continuity within the culturally and historically heterogeneous elements that could be said to define a religion, and by extension, those who practice it. A second, related, consequence of organizing knowledge around the notion of distinct religions is that such an approach naturalizes the creation of lineages and historical narratives. The Latin root of our word “tradition” points to “what is handed down,” an image that evokes the faithful transmission of some unchanging and precious object, from hand to hand, across a vast expanse of time, in what could be characterized as a kind of transtemporal fire brigade. While lineages and historical narratives serve to uncover change over time, more commonly they function as stories that privilege the time of origins, contrasted with later decline, or, alternatively, as accounts of development and progress.

My purpose here is not to take on the much debated question of what we mean by religions and whether we ought to organize our

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<sup>4</sup>) On the history of these ideas, see Smith 1998.

<sup>5</sup>) See, e.g., Asad 1993; King 1999; Masuzawa 2005.



study in terms of such concepts, but rather to focus attention on the perspectives that an extended study of relic practices opens up, perspectives that I hope will advance our reflections on the practice of comparison in the study of religion and religions. To return to that image of “handing down,” I’m struck by how well it encapsulates something that appears central to all relic practices: the valorization, transmission, and protection of potent religious objects. In general these are objects that begin their lives as integral parts of human bodies;<sup>6</sup> though they may be differentiated by function while still attached to those bodies (teeth, fingers, arms, etc.), they nevertheless begin as parts of larger wholes. Upon being separated from these integrated wholes (often after death, but not necessarily), they begin their life as independent parts with a marked power to establish and maintain a wide assortment of linkages and continuities, both spatial and temporal. Certainly, textual accounts are one means through which their power is constituted and attested, but as Cynthia Hahn’s article in this collection demonstrates, the containers in which relics were placed likewise shaped how medieval Christian relics were encountered and made accessible (or inaccessible); much the same could be said for the relic monuments (*stūpas*) that gave shape to the distinctive Buddhist landscape described in Anne Blackburn’s paper, a landscape that she characterizes as making a series of “visual arguments.” The relics’ religious potency, moreover, is made apparent through the distinctive forms of behavior that they elicit and organize, ranging from gestures and postures of veneration to the construction of built environments within which relics function.

The study of relic practices has implications both for understanding the nature of those practices within the context of the diverse traditions within which they are found, as well as for the study of religion more broadly, particularly as this relates to the task of comparison. Continuing with my overarching theme of “part representing whole,”

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<sup>6</sup> Not all relic practices are centered on corporeal remains. Various Buddhist traditions, for example, have applied the term relic (*dhātu*) to a range of objects associated with buddhas and other enlightened beings, including bodily remains, objects empowered through physical contact, objects linked to these beings through resemblance (images), texts, etc. For an analysis of various relic classification systems in the Indo-Tibetan tradition, see Bentor 2003.

I will begin by identifying some significant dynamics in the relic practices discussed in the five articles that follow, using the rubric of “Unity — Division — Unity.” In the concluding section of this essay, I will draw out some of the insights that the study of these relic practices offers us for thinking about the comparative study of religion, organized under the contrasting rubric of “Division — Unity — Division.” It must be noted, of course, that these two dynamics, while analytically distinguishable, are nevertheless fundamentally related and the oscillation between division and unity should be seen as ongoing.

### **Unity — Division — Unity**

As I have noted, relics commonly start out as parts of living people’s bodies. The death of those persons enables a process of division or fragmentation through which parts of those bodies can be separated, allowing them to be dispersed. Those body parts, having been physically transported, are then established in new locations and, once enshrined, function in a way that authorizes diverse dynamics of integration and unification operating on a wide range of registers. Let me give some specific examples from the articles that follow.

Cynthia Hahn’s essay provides us with a focused analysis of two medieval Christian reliquaries and their role in inscribing a distinctive subjectivity in those who encounter them. Her account exemplifies what can be learned from a careful examination of the physical features of specific reliquaries when placed in the built environments within which they function, and when set in motion, as it were, through the ritualized performances of those drawn to their presence. The relics of the saints, as mediated through the embedded symbolism of their material containers, serve as privileged interfaces between a celestial realm in which the saints enjoy a special intimacy with God’s presence (as well as intercessory access), and the faithful who, through their interactions with these extraordinary objects, come to embody *reverentia*, a particular mode of bodily deportment that can be seen as an appropriate engagement with the saint’s transformative power.

These reliquaries can thus be seen to orchestrate a diversity of cognitive and social functions. As works of art, fabricated from precious metals and adorned with sparkling gems, they assert a powerful visual

presence. Like all things visual, they seem to just be there before the eyes of the viewer, immediately present. And yet, as Hahn's analysis makes clear, reliquaries conceal as much as they reveal. For the actual relic remains safely hidden beneath the glorious interface presented by the reliquary, and those who draw near to view it approach an object whose significance is mediated through a dense network of historical narratives and behavioral codes. Moreover, as she notes, the creation and renovation of reliquaries has provided lay patrons and church authorities with welcome opportunities for displaying their piety and consolidating their authority. Relics and reliquaries serve effectively to construct and maintain an integrated social body that is simultaneously internally differentiated by a diversity of hierarchized and complementary statuses, extending vertically from the earthly realm upward to the court of heaven, and horizontally across the stratified ranks of ecclesiastical and political actors.

Hahn provocatively juxtaposes two quite different modes of engagement — that of a hypothetical twenty-first-century viewer who would most likely encounter these objects in a museum setting and who has been schooled to evaluate them according to disciplinary standards (aesthetic, historical, cultural), and that of a medieval Christian who might interact with them in a church setting or in the midst of a religious procession, and in whom they are supposed to evoke *reverentia*.<sup>7</sup> It is illuminating to see both of these modes of engagement as shaped by distinctive forms of ritualization that are keyed to the structured environments within which the objects are set. This comparative framing of museum and cathedral resonates with issues brought out in Oren Stier's article on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which I will discuss in more detail below.

Anne Blackburn's article highlights the sustaining role that Buddhist relic practices have played in the history of South and Southeast Asian political formations. Central to those formations has been the establishment and maintenance of authoritative links between the Buddha,

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<sup>7</sup> Though what could be considered appropriate forms of *reverentia* was clearly a matter of some contestation, as in the famous case of St. Hugh of Lincoln who, in his successful attempt to acquire relics of St. Mary Magdalene from Fécamp Abbey in Normandy, bit off two fragments from an arm bone relic, and justified it by analogy to his pious consumption of the eucharist; see Sumption 1975:35.

who lived in North India and Nepal, and his extended *sāsana* (teaching/tradition/religion)<sup>8</sup> throughout the region. This “core technology of the state,” as she puts it, employed a diversity of relic practices, including the creation and renovation of relic sites, the composition and performance of lineage narratives centered on relics, kings, and Buddhist monastics, and the performance of relic-centered merit-making activities, to establish and maintain royal authority and the integrity of the state in the face of internal and external threats. Again, we are presented with vivid examples of how relic practices can forge spatial and temporal continuities through the controlled dispersion of potent objects (including monks, relics and texts) and through the simultaneous differentiation and integration of distinct social groups whose complementary relic-centered activities are understood to serve a range of mundane and soteriological goals. And, as in the case of the reliquaries that provide the focus for Hahn’s essay, the relics discussed in Blackburn’s article are for the most part encountered only through their containers — the often massive relic monuments within which Buddhist reliquaries and their relics are enshrined, and through the construction and renovation of which kings throughout South and Southeast Asia have displayed and consolidated their political authority while simultaneously pursuing their personal religious ends.

The kings who undertook these *stūpa* constructions and renovations could look back to a powerful exemplar: the great third-century BCE emperor Aśoka, whose paradigmatic collection and redistribution of relics across the continent of South Asia was recounted in a succession of Buddhist lineage texts. The accounts of Aśoka’s foundation of an ideal Buddhist kingdom through the distribution of the Buddha’s relics, and the narratives of later relic enshrinements,<sup>9</sup> provided an enduring set of linkages between the land where the Buddha *sāsana* arose and the lands outside the Indian subcontinent where it spread. The Buddha’s material remains were central to the unfolding of these accounts, as was the role of the monastic community whose members could themselves be seen as embodying the unbroken transmission of

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<sup>8</sup>) This Pāli term resists easy translation; for its significance in Sri Lankan Buddhism, see Malalgoda 1997.

<sup>9</sup>) For Sri Lankan Buddhism, see Berkwitz 2004 and Kemper 1991; for Thai Buddhism, see Tambiah 1976 and Swearer 2004.

the Buddha's *dhamma* (teaching) and *vinaya* (monastic rule). Stories of the physical relocation of the Buddha's relics were typically linked in these lineage accounts with the actions of important Buddhist monks who transported the relics and with the pious deeds of the kings who built the relic monuments and who held the lavish ceremonies through which the relics were enshrined; these accounts also frequently connected these later enshrinements with particular locations where the Buddha is said to have either been physically present during his life-time or where he predicted that his relics would be enshrined after his final passing away. Blackburn's account shows clearly the integrative power of Buddhist relic practices to establish enduring connections through time and space, connections that were mediated by the controlled movement of physical objects and the repeated retelling of lineage narratives. Once enshrined, these relic sites became privileged spaces within which the cultivation of a distinctive Buddhist *habitus* could be taught and practiced.<sup>10</sup>

Brannon Wheeler's paper likewise examines the role of relics, in this case the hair, sweat and nails of the prophet Muhammad, in defining an integrated social body centered around Mecca. As in the Buddhist examples discussed in Blackburn's essay, texts and potent objects play strategic roles in defining and propagating a religious community as it expands outward from its time and place of origin. In contrast to Blackburn's South and Southeast Asian Buddhist examples, however, the movement that Wheeler identifies appears predominantly centripetal. For the accounts of Muhammad's actions do not appear to serve the authorization of a collection of potent objects that can be transported and enshrined at the margins of an expanding religious civilization. Instead, the stories establish a paradigmatic rite of passage that requires future followers to enact their transformation and incorporation by coming to Mecca.

Wheeler's example foregrounds the centrality of sacrifice, a practice of killing and dismembering a sacrificial offering (in this case, camels that serve as exemplars for all domesticated animals) for the purposes of expiation and purification, a practice with roots in pre-Islamic

<sup>10)</sup> For an insightful application of Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* to an understanding of Indian Buddhist image practices during the Pāla period, see Kinnard 1999.

Arabia. Also central to this sacrifice is the principle of substitution, whereby the sacrifice of an animal replaces a human sacrifice. Wheeler draws numerous parallels between the accounts of the prophet's sacrifice, associated with his final pilgrimage to Mecca, and mythic accounts from a wide range of religious traditions in which a primal being is sacrificed, dismembered, and distributed to establish an authoritative social order, a dynamic that Wheeler identifies as a "sociogenic" act. While he stresses that the distributed bodily remains of the prophet are understood as dead reminders of the prophet's sacrifice in the past (in contrast, for example, to the continuing presence of Christian saints in and through their relics),<sup>11</sup> the mimetic linkage of his sacrifice with the practices of contemporary pilgrims to Mecca points to the continuing force of these rites of passage for integrating the faithful into a collective social order.

While the first three articles in this collection represent religious communities that have, in the past at least, strongly affirmed the value of what I am calling relic practices, the final two essays present a rather different sort of shared testimony. These articles have a modern focus and analyze religious communities that appear to deny the religious value of bodily relics. In these latter two cases, relic practices appear to index social tensions.

Peter Flügel's article reveals a dimension of modern Jain religion that has been understudied, in part because it appears to directly contradict the commonly accepted view that the orthodox Jain tradition has consistently rejected the practice of bone relic veneration, a form of attachment to material objects deemed inconsistent with the fundamental religious ideals of the tradition. This is in marked contrast to its ancient Indian competitor, Buddhism, though it is interesting to note that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European and American scholarship on Buddhism adopted a similarly critical attitude toward Buddhist relic practices, explaining their prevalence as a corruption of the original tradition introduced for the sake of the laity (Trainor 1997). Flügel's article, which draws upon fieldwork among

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<sup>11</sup> The question of the continuing "presence" of the Buddha in his relics is more complex, and scholars have articulated a variety of interpretations; see, e.g., Trainor 1997 and Strong 2004.

Indian Jains that began in 1997, testifies to widespread practices of preserving and venerating the remains of elite ascetic Jain monks and nuns, a practice that is simultaneously clandestine and public. While this practice appears to present a doctrinal and historical conundrum, his essay points to the complex interplay of selectively appropriated textual traditions and contemporary ritual practices for which there are no clear textual warrants, traditions and practices that form what he calls a Jain “cultural unconscious.” It is clear that rejection vs. support for these practices does not neatly line up along an elite/popular divide. It is also apparent that bone relic veneration serves the interests of sectarian Jain communities seeking to consolidate their identities and further their influence through material links with charismatic ascetic renunciants whose bodily remains are associated with miraculous powers.

Flügel’s article concludes with an extended reflection on how scholars should explain the powerful agency that those engaged in relic practices attribute to the relics with which they interact. Having reviewed earlier scholarship on this question and found it lacking, he argues that we are in need of a general theory that elucidates the function of relics as “symbolically generalized media of social interaction and communication.” Drawing upon Marx’s work on commodity fetishism, as well as other social theorists, he observes: “Like money, *bona fide* relics are not merely physical objects; they are also social forms. Their ‘miraculous’ metaphysical qualities derive, like those of money, in part from their function as media of social interaction. As a focus of emotive energy within a social configuration, relics, like living saints, can appear to be the source rather than the recipient of the energy that pervades the social configuration.” There is much to appreciate in this analysis as a broad explanatory model for understanding how agency can be attributed to this special class of objects, though I think it is also useful to place this approach in dialogue with the interpretive approaches taken up by the other authors in this issue. We may ask, for example, if Flügel’s functional analysis is consistent with or stands in tension with the more particularist historical analysis that characterizes the articles by Hahn, Blackburn, and Wheeler. In Blackburn’s and Wheeler’s studies, the integrative social function of relic practices is quite apparent, though that broad functionality is set

against a backdrop of changing historical and cultural circumstances, and the rich collection of textual sources upon which they draw provides a more complex picture of how the social function of relics plays out in particular circumstances. In the case of Hahn's essay, we find a deeper engagement with the objects' (reliquaries') materiality, alongside detailed textual accounts of how relics were perceived. Following her lead, one might observe in response to Flügel's comment above, that "reliquaries are not merely social forms; they are also physical objects," each with distinctive sensory characteristics that resist attempts at generalizing their function. They are, moreover, objects with which a diversity of ritualized social actors interact (each shaped by personal histories as well as broader social markers such as gender). While we may be able to identify some of the broad characteristics of that ritualization, specific interactions between individual agent and object remain fluid and strategic.

The interpretive dialogue becomes richer still when Oren Stier's study of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) is brought into the conversation. As noted above, Flügel's and Stier's articles have a good deal in common in that both have a contemporary setting and benefit from access to sources that provide a window on the interactions of identifiable social agents, thus revealing the active and, at times, agonistic negotiation of religious meaning and identity. Both also highlight religious traditions that, in terms of formal doctrine, are critical of relic practices focused on bodily remains. In addition, both Flügel's and Stier's essays engage theoretically with the problem of defining and interpreting relic practices, at times employing similar vocabulary (fetishism, commodification).

Stier's essay foregrounds these issues of negotiated religious identity so effectively, in part, because the USHMM functions as a privileged site for authorizing and rejecting various strategies for defining Jewishness and religiousness, set against the standards of American secularism. This is, after all, a secular museum, one that in formal, legal terms cannot be allowed to be "too religious," or by extension, "too Jewish." And yet, as an institution committed to a program of preserving the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, vast numbers of whom were targeted for extinction because of their Jewishness as the Nazis defined this, a display of Jewishness is unavoidable. Stier's analysis, based in



part on archival materials, reveals how museum officials negotiated these tensions through the configuration of specific spaces, the acquisition of particular objects, and through specific modes of display deemed both historically authentic and respectful toward the religious sensibilities of Jewish supporters of the museum, as well as visitors.

In what sense, Stier asks, can the USHMM be seen as a contemporary Jewish reliquary? This question gets worked out in relation to the presence (or absence) of particular objects in the permanent collection and their modes of display: desecrated Torah scroll fragments, human hair from the victims of the extermination camps, and soil collected from a number of Holocaust sites. All of these carry a powerful emotional force, in part through their physical connection to events and places related to the Holocaust, and each class of object and its form of display was subjected to extended debate among a diversity of interested parties. Perhaps surprisingly to those unfamiliar with Rabbinic law, the display of the Torah scroll fragments was highly controversial. Even though the fragments are no longer usable in a ritual setting, they nevertheless retain their sanctity as bearers of the divine name, and Jewish law requires that they either be buried or stored out of sight in a *geniza*, a special depository for unusable sacred texts, in anticipation of their burial. This requirement was addressed in the permanent exhibit by “burying” them above ground in a display case that functions as a kind of glass coffin.

Perhaps also surprisingly, human hair is classified in Jewish law as clearly distinct from human remains (in contrast to bones) and therefore is not regarded as a polluting substance that would prevent members of the Cohanim (patrilineal descendents of the patriarch Aaron) from entering the museum. In light of this interpretation, a collection of human hair was acquired from the State Museum at Auschwitz, but after further reflection and debate, it was decided that it should not be displayed. In this instance, the feelings of those who lost relatives in the Holocaust played a decisive role; a display of human hair from the camps, however powerful its capacity to communicate an emotionally charged lesson about the extreme forms of dehumanization perpetrated by the Nazis, was rejected out of respect for survivors of the Holocaust and their descendants for whom a museum display was felt to be too objectifying. The curators finally substituted a photograph of

the hair display at Auschwitz. Stier observes: "...by not displaying the hair, the USHMM has avoided the possibility of fetishizing it and re-victimizing the victims. But in doing so its planners have also 'chosen representation over presentation,' reducing the object to an image of the object that weakens the power the authentic artifact would have carried."

Particularly striking here is Stier's use of language that resonates with Flügel's analytical terminology of commodity and fetish. In Flügel's analysis, a powerful relic gains its potency through the socially informed projection of human agency on an object physically associated with the deceased; its social value derives from its capacity to catalyze certain forms of social interaction. Stier's analysis of the controversy over the hair display in the USHMM certainly bears witness to the hair's catalyzing force, though interestingly, the controversy was resolved in a way that subordinated an official "religious" interpretation (which effectively detached the hair from its human source) to one that asserted an indissoluble emotional bond between the hair and victims from whom it was taken.

### **Division — Unity — Division**

I would like to conclude with some comments on relics and the practice of comparison. I think it is widely acknowledged that the comparative study of religion has come to be seen by many scholars of religion as a problematic enterprise. It has been criticized for its totalizing and universalizing tendencies, which, in its authoritative nineteenth- and early twentieth-century forms, was tied to a troubling evolutionary narrative. Where such explicit evolutionary discourses were avoided, as in Eliade's work, the assertion of an essential, human predisposition to a unique religious experience has been criticized as a form of theological foundationalism. And post-modern critiques have called into question universalist and objectivist claims for any science of religion.<sup>12</sup> At

<sup>12</sup>) Many of the challenges that have been directed toward the comparative study of religion are insightfully engaged in Patton and Ray 2000, which highlights the contributions of Jonathan Z. Smith's groundbreaking reconfiguration of the comparative study of religion.

the same time, those of us who work within historical and cultural frameworks that validate local knowledge can find our work as scholars of religion Balkanized into relatively narrow specializations. In this respect I think it is fair to say that the study of religion is presently characterized by some deep theoretical and practical divisions.

As the articles in this collection demonstrate, however, the study of relic practices can provide a useful model for the framing of comparative projects. The goal of such comparative inquiries need not be the identification of essential similarities that transcend cultural and historical specifics, but the exploration of meaningful differences, differences that only become apparent through the framing of comparisons. In this manner we come to the comparative enterprise highly aware of the importance of the historical and cultural particularities that give shape to our objects of study, and self-conscious of the extent to which our framing of specific comparative projects is strategic and in need of theoretical reflection. We can thus undertake the practice of cross-cultural, cross-tradition comparison as a useful unifying strategy that facilitates the identification and exploration of broader dynamics that can then be explored in more localized contexts.

What are some of the broader dynamics that emerge from a comparative study of relic practices? I will highlight four that I see emerging from the five articles in this collection. First of all, the study of relics invites a serious engagement with materiality in a variety of forms. Relics are, first of all, objects, and they lend themselves to material exchange and control. And relics are also commonly surrounded by built environments that powerfully engage the human senses and facilitate the embodiment of culturally affirmed behavioral routines. Second, while the comparative study of relic practices may open out into considerations of broad religious cosmologies or worldviews, those wide-ranging conceptual systems can be explored as they play out within the local contexts in which particular relics are established. So, for example, the Buddhist principle of karma can be seen to authorize specific forms of merit-making activities that are organized and performed in accordance with the distinctive histories of particular relics. Third, to borrow a metaphor from the natural sciences, the study of relic sites and the practices with which they are associated can illuminate a social landscape like a kind of cultural fMRI scan. Relic sites

often represent nodal points in wide-ranging social systems that function both to differentiate and integrate social agents (both individuals and groups) marked by a multiplicity of statuses (political, economic, religious). And it is through the formalized behaviors that are taught and performed in these cultic sites that ritual agents pursue and attain a diversity of ends, including the furthering of sectarian identities. Finally, relics are often closely associated with human limit conditions that evoke powerful emotions. Even when relics are sharply differentiated from the typical processes of decomposition and putrefaction to which ordinary human corpses are subject, the “special dead” gain their distinctiveness against a backdrop of human finitude, severed relationships, and anxieties about impurity. The capacity of relics to mediate connections across these relational divides frequently endows relic practices with powerful emotional force.

To return to the quotation from Caroline Bynum’s work with which I began, there is in the comparative enterprise a kind of comic optimism about the possibility of comprehending the extraordinary diversity of human religious phenomena. While we as scholars of religion remain highly aware of the fragmented character of our attempts to gain a wider, more integrated vision of our subject matter, we can nevertheless persevere in our collective attempts to keep the parts in dialogue with the whole.

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## What Do Reliquaries Do for Relics?

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### Abstract

This article introduces prominent issues that surround the Christian use of reliquaries, first discussing examples from Trier made by the renowned Archbishop Egbert in the tenth century, then turning to early Christian texts to investigate the beginnings of relic practice and belief. Of special interest are the letters and poems of Paulinus of Nola, but also the commentaries of Augustine, Ambrose, Victricius of Rouen and others that flesh out an understanding of how reliquaries were essential to the project of creating an appropriate *reverentia* for relics (Peter Brown's term). The materiality of reliquaries, their creation of social relations, particular issues of enclosure and beauty, and questions of potential visibility are given special consideration.

### Keywords

Relic, reliquary, Paulinus of Nola, Egbert of Trier, vision, audience

### Relics and Reliquaries

Dramatically lit and displayed like a precious gem in its glass vitrine in the cool, secure vault of the treasury of the Limburg-an-der-Lahn Cathedral, a curiously phallic-shaped, hyper-attenuated object captures the viewer's attention but at the same moment confounds it (fig. 1). For the modern viewer, the object allows little or no insight into either its meaning or its controversial and dramatic past. One's first impression is of an entity, glittering, magnificent, static, and undeniably exotic. Over six feet long and covered with gold foil, what could be described as a floating spear, culminates at its apex in a small orb heavily ornamented with gems, pearls, enamels, filigree, and many, many inscriptions.



*Figure 1.* Limburg an der Lahn Cathedral Treasury. Reliquary of the Staff of Peter. Trier c. 980. Detail (Wikimedia).

The inscriptions — in Latin — introduce a series of demands that the object makes upon the spectator. They call upon viewers capable of reading (and close enough to piece together the long series of letters), to recognize the illustrious origin of the relic inside this reliquary, which itself was made in Trier. The first words, “*Baculum beati Petri*,” claim that this is the very “staff of Saint Peter,” reputed to have been used by an early bishop of Trier to resurrect a dead man. As a relic, therefore, it claims to be doubly sacred, invested with the indexical aura of having once touched the hands of Saint Peter, founder of the Western church, and proven already to be a conduit of miraculous power.

But even the illiterate, semi-literate, or relatively inattentive viewer is not likely to miss at least a portion of the message that this golden staff aggressively promotes. The enamels on the upper curve of the spherical knob represent the four evangelical beasts, the lower curve is encircled by a similarly worked series of enamels depicting, in the company of Peter himself, three early Trier bishops, each labeled, including Eucharius who was said to have accomplished the resurrection. A third and fourth row of six enamels represent the twelve Apostles, again with very legible labels. Down the long sides of the staff, paralleling equally long inscriptions, are the low relief portraits of twelve popes and twelve bishops of Trier, ending with the living archbishop and patron of the magnificent object, Egbert. Even if the viewer identifies only a few members of this impressive cast of characters, it is evident that the whole is a depiction of the hierarchy of the church and represents Trier's position as an apostolically founded archbishopric within a grand ecclesiastical "framework."

The actual framework is, of course, significant as well. The power of gold and gems is organized into a lattice that holds and doubles the meaning of the figural elements. Series of gems and pearls in fours, sixes and twelves are repeated among the network of precious stones that encloses the enamels. At the very top of the staff, a cross shape arrangement of emeralds lifted high on beautifully "architectural" settings suggests the eternal Cross ruling over the Heavenly Jerusalem, the holy city that is often symbolized by gems recalling its twelve gates.

Clearly, this reliquary is a magnificent and powerful enclosure and *representation* of a relic which supports the bishopric of Trier in its place in the Earthly Church and is capable of astounding miracles that connect it to the heavenly Church.

In the last sentence, the word "representation" is carefully chosen. What is the relic really? Did it indeed belong to Trier, and by what right? Why is it no longer in Trier, its proclaimed and vaunted home? Only further careful examination begins to open up these potentially troubling issues.

The long inscription itself reveals the first intimations of uncertainty. In tracing the provenance of the relic from Peter to Eucharius, first bishop of Trier, through a short residence in Metz to escape the "Huns" (Normans) and via Cologne finally back to Trier where it was



divided and a portion returned to Cologne, keeping the upper portion for Trier, the text not only drops names of saints, bishops, and emperors (Otto I and II), and thereby accumulates much prestige, but also repeatedly calls attention to “this church.” In its fulsome claims to prestige, does it cast doubt on its own accuracy; does it protest too much?<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, as the historian Thomas Head has argued, the claims that the reliquary makes in this inscription, as well as in its entire presentation, are “brazen” fiction and represent the first time that a text records the claim that the staff had been given to Eucharis by Peter (Head 1997:68). Cologne also independently claimed a staff of Peter which, in fact, it never gave up to Trier. Ultimately, the desire to possess such a staff is a consequence of the fierce competition to claim the status of foremost archbishopric of the empire, and we find this object in the center of the controversy.

What is really inside the reliquary? Typical of reliquaries made in the western medieval world, this golden staff holds its relic tightly and invisibly, inaccessible to either devout or skeptical eyes. Nevertheless, its (somewhat exaggerated) staff-shaped form allows it to intimate a whole and undamaged relic, carefully protected from Huns and/or the ravages of time (a dubious assertion indeed). Furthermore, its long staff shape allowed it to be carried and to be prominently visible in processions — and it is known to have been carried by Egbert himself. Moreover, in these processions it would have shared star billing with another famous and striking reliquary made for Egbert that also

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<sup>1</sup>) *BACULUM BEATI PETRI QVONDAM PRO RESVSCITATIONE MATERNI AB IPSO TRANSMISSVM. ET A SCO EUCHARIO HUC DELATVM. DIV HAEC AECLESIA TENVIT. POSTEA HVNORVM VT FERTVR TEMPORIBVS METTIS CVM RELIQVIS HVIVS AECLESIAE THESAVRIS DEPORTATUS IBI VSQ. AD TEMPORA OTTONIS PISSIMI IMPERATORIS SENIORIS PERMANSIT. INDE A FRATRE EIVS BRVNONE ARCHIEPO ET ANNVENTE VENERABILI VVERINO COLONIAE ARCHIEPO. NE ET HAEC AECLESIA TANTO THESAVRO FRAVDARETVR. IN DVAS EST PARTES TRANSSECTVS. VNA SVPERIORI VIDELICET HVIC AECLESIAE REDDITA ET A EBURNEO IBIDEN RETENTA. ANNO DOMINICAE INCARNAT DCCCCLXXX INDI... (VIII) (Westermann-Angerhausen 1973:36).*

claimed an apostolic association, the presence of which would reinforce the staff's prestige (fig. 2).

The self-proclaimed "altar consecrated to Andrew" contains, according to further details of its inscription: the Nail of the Lord, the sandal of Andrew, the beard of Peter, and "other holy relics" (Westermann-Angerhausen 1973:22; also Westermann-Angerhausen 1987, 1990, 1999). Once more, Egbert who is named as patron, has made the association to apostolic origins, now to *both* Peter and Andrew. As Head notes, Egbert has chosen through this reliquary altar with its diverse contents to highlight Andrew, the apostolic patron of Constantinople. As a member of the Ottonian court, Egbert was no novice to the niceties of invoking Byzantine prestige and power. One of the many antique spolia (or re-used artworks) included on the altar is a Frankish fibula inset with a coin of the Byzantine emperor Justinian at its center, a further glorification by association of the Trier relics (and a claim to great age and authenticity).

Of course the Andrew altar, with its image of a disembodied foot, presents a spectacle even more astounding and strange than the staff reliquary. We must agree in this case with the text of Romans 10:15: "How beautiful are the feet of those [the Apostles] who bring good news of good things!" With this foot as frame for the sandal of the Apostle, Egbert is creating a striking, memorable and indeed beautiful image and perhaps also making a personal claim to the metaphor of mission and conversion implied by the sandal (travel), inherited by the bishop of an apostolically founded see (Westermann-Angerhausen 1987). Although we will not explore such "body part reliquaries" and their full range of meanings, it is already apparent how impressive and creative such reliquaries could be (Hahn 1997a; Reudenbach 2000, 2008).

Turning back to the staff reliquary, one wonders how much remains of the object manufactured in circa 980 in Egbert's acclaimed workshop. Years of being carried in processions of various kinds produced damage to its length and repairs are recorded to the gems and details of ornaments (Westermann-Angerhausen 1973:39–40). Like all such reliquaries, over 1,000 years old, to some extent, this beautiful object is a product of making and re-making. It would not adequately put forth its splendid testimony if its gems and gold were allowed to be



*Figure 2.* Trier Cathedral Treasury. Portable Altar of Saint Andrew. Trier c. 980 (Sacred Destinations).

battered and broken. In its long history of possession and repossession, it has landed outside its original home and now is in the Diocesan museum of Limburg an der Lahn.

A first introduction to early medieval reliquaries has begun here with two exemplary objects. Both, and in particular the staff, perfectly represent the issues that are key aspects of medieval reliquaries — the object is not aberrant but typical.

We have found that the reliquary works hard to “represent” the relic as powerful, holy and sacred, part of the larger institution of the Church, at times using biblical metaphor as part of the process of creating meaning. While at the same time the relic is thus made “fully visible” in its power and associations, it is also unquestionably hidden

from view. Obscured by a glittering container covered with gems (meaningful even in its very materials), it was given very specific value in an elaborate system of provenance and exchange, exchange through gift, theft or even invention. As an object of continuing power, the reliquary has been constantly revised, physically or contextually, and brought up to date, surviving even today as a token of prestige for the modern church. However, in contrast to its modern isolation in a case, lit and immobilized as an art object, it was created to be a dynamic part of the chorus of saints, in company with other relics and reliquaries, representing the Church and its saints and their powers. It has been used, throughout its history, as an object to be carried and manipulated, displayed and presented.

Before, however, exploring these themes further we must pause to define and clarify terms. First and foremost: What is a relic? What is a reliquary?

The simplest answer to the first question is that a relic is a physical object that is understood to carry the *virtus* of a saint or Christ, literally the virtue but more accurately the power of the holy person. It could be a bone or bones, some other portion of the body, or merely some object that has been sanctified by having come into contact with a sacred person. It is often necessary that it be identified by a tag or *authentic*.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes it is even a tertiary relic or *brandeum*, an object that has touched a relic and now also carries the transferred, one might almost say “contagious” *virtus*. Material from sites in the Holy Land — dust, oil or water — was collected avidly and called “blessings” or *eulogiae*; perhaps at first more appropriately defined as the stuff of holy souvenirs rather than as relics, it gradually assumed the more sacred status as the objects came to circulate in the medieval West (Vikan 1982).

Although relic veneration is not clearly established as a practice by the Church until the fourth century, the first evidence of Christian relic veneration involves the faithful of Smyrna who in the mid second century CE collected the bones of the martyr Polycarp in order to use them to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom, calling them

<sup>2</sup>) Authentic is a modern word for these customary labels that are perhaps as old as the seventh century (Hermann-Mascard 1975:120–2).

“more dear than precious stones” (Hermann-Mascard 1975:23). In other words, relics are defined through the recognition by some audience of the presence of power that leads to a certain desirability. The power may be represented by miracles or simply be acknowledged by institutional affirmation. Most important is that without some form of recognition, a relic is merely bone, dust, or scraps of cloth. An audience is essential. Its attention authenticates the relic.

Thus, it is apparent why reliquaries themselves are also essential. They are mentioned in the earliest texts concerning relics as a means of honoring and transporting the sacred substances of relics, but they also, from the beginning, carry messages about the significance, authenticity, and meaning of the relics. Even if such messages are carried only by the abstractions of the prestige of precious materials, reliquaries are in their essence a mediation between relics and audiences. As such, we will see that they teach meanings and prepare the audience for the proper reception and treatment of the holy objects, what Peter Brown calls *reverentia*, “an etiquette toward the supernatural” (Brown 1981:119).

Although it is not unusual for reliquaries themselves to become objects of veneration as a sort of slippage of the meaning between container and contained,<sup>3</sup> ultimately we must understand these objects as profoundly utilitarian. In the modern sense they are not art works and surely not “art for art’s sake.” They are intended to elicit veneration and to honor the relic — but beauty is decidedly subservient to these primary needs. One exemplary consequence of such priorities is that reliquaries rarely have integrity as unique objects. They are only rarely “original” art works because they often closely adhere to precedents.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, they are constantly remade — a renewal that is not just practical but significant: “All things renewed are pleasing to God; Christ is ever renewing all things, and ennobling them to enhance His light” (Walsh 1975:308).

With these words, Paulinus of Nola, circa 400, one of the very first writers to comment on reliquaries, concludes his comments on the

<sup>3</sup>) For this slippage, see Hahn 1997a; for examples see Dierkens 1999:224.

<sup>4</sup>) I think this is why art historians have been reluctant to attempt more inclusive discussions of reliquaries. Not until art history could feel comfortable with ritual and reception theories could these objects be seriously studied.

rebuilding of the architectural shrine of Saint Felix. His comments express the motivations of any cleric or patron who renews and refurbishes a sacred reliquary or shrine — or for that matter encloses an ancient relic in a new reliquary. His words deserve our close attention as a first and very early example of an understanding of how reliquaries work and why reliquaries are made.

Paulinus describes two processes in his approach to relics: “ennobling” relics by encasing them in order to create “enhanced light” and to appreciate their origin in Christ; and “renewing” older reliquaries and structures out of honor to their contents and their ultimate maker. Both share in the same intent. Paulinus makes it quite clear that a spiritual dynamic is set in motion in his work, a dynamic which seeks to recharge the power of the relic for its audience. In his description, the renewal of the buildings around the shrine can be compared to the cleansing of the soul of a sinner, preparing it for the Last Judgment:

A new look gleams on the outside of the walls while the antiquity is hidden, enclosed within. . . . They are simultaneously old and new — neither equally new nor equally old. They are the same yet not the same as they depict the shape of future and present blessings. . . . So it will be on the day when men are permitted to rise again with life renewed. Amongst those who rise, precedence will be given to the group whose flesh is covered with a shining garment. (Walsh 1975:301–2)

Renewal becomes a virtue of the soul and a natural and spiritual process that must not be ignored. Although the sacred core remains untouched, all around it has been refreshed, polished, and perfected. The connection of these sacred things to the resurrection and end of time is explicit — in Paulinus’s words and in his renewal is contained the promise of the future.

Paulinus even begins to explicate the very important and very common occurrence in reliquaries of *spolia* or reused elements, often gems. Paulinus explains that, although he left the original cult building alone: “It remains inset like a jewel amongst the buildings” (Walsh 1975:120). There is no embarrassment in this sort of retouching, and the core seems to be rightfully hidden, although it is not destroyed. Ultimately, perhaps the most telling aspect of Paulinus’ poem is his use of a bodily metaphor for the reliquary. Surprisingly, however, it is not the relic and its reliquary that is justified in terms of a previous living

body but the newly arisen body of the faithful soul that is given value in its transfiguration into a sort of reliquary: “flesh . . . covered with a shining garment.”

Such a metaphorical linking of body and soul, relic and shrine is not unusual in medieval commentary on relics but is a first and very early instance in which a patron expresses his actions as clearly spiritual rather than artistic. As we will see, later clerics, although perhaps not so high-minded, followed the same path — making and remaking reliquaries as part of their duty to the Church; as part of a spiritual project to lift the minds of the faithful.

We are thus engaged, it would seem, in the study of a sort of object that resists most of the categories of conventional art history. Their beauty is secondary, their originality suspect, and their meaning and contents often obscure. The dating of such composite objects is difficult, and documentation often scanty or incomplete. Many of the richest collections and most renowned objects have been destroyed in the French Revolution or Protestant upheavals. Perhaps most damning of all, the charges of being products of “superstition” and “pious ignorance” cling to them like a sticky ooze. To the modern mind, they are at best uncanny, at worst only the utilitarian instruments of misdirected piety. Nonetheless, undeniably, they hold a certain fascination.

As Patrick Geary has noted, however, “given the importance of saints . . . the articulated doctrine of the saints’ cult . . . is . . . remarkably small in theology and law” (Geary 1994:42). Early doctrine and discussion of relics occurs in a variety of sources. One primary source, because early and evocative, is a sermon written by Victricius Bishop of Rouen upon the occasion of his reception of a number of relic fragments from Ambrose of Milan, *De Laude sanctorum* (396 A.D.). It vividly fleshes out the contemporary cult of relics and relic devotion. Another rich source for our purposes are the poems and letters of Paulinus of Nola, encountered briefly above, celebrating his patron saint Felix and ardently describing his personal devotion to relics in poems and in letters. Augustine, Gregory the Great and Gregory of Tours all discussed saints and relics in important ways. Only in treatises that criticize the excesses and errors of the cult of saints, however, e.g., those of Claudius of Turin in his 825 *Apologeticum atque rescriptum*, and Guibert of Nogent, in his *De pignoribus sanctorum* of the early

twelfth century, do we get away from devotional, narrative or liturgical contexts. Finally, at the turn of the twelfth century, Thiofridus of Echternach writes the only medieval treatise focused on the meaning of relics and specifically discusses reliquaries in his *Flores Epytaphii Sanctorum* (Ferrari 1996). Of course, many other saints' lives and miracle accounts also contribute to our understanding, but, in effect, it was practice not theology that determined the shape of the cult of relics.

This "shape" was formed by "acts, uses, and ritual in society" (Geary 1978:42), but also concerned the imaginative place of relics in medieval culture, a topic so beautifully sketched by Peter Brown in his *Cult of the Saints*. In considering both, I think it helpful to turn again to Paulinus of Nola who introduces us to many of the issues concerning the practice of the cult of relics including their acquisition, whether by gift or theft and their celebration in art.

Although the normal means of acquiring relics was through the reception of a gift, theft was an alternative as Geary explains:

Not only were theft and gift more basic forms of property circulation than trade in the early Middle Ages, but they enjoyed higher prestige. . . . In both situations [gift or theft], the relationship of relative honor and status was at stake, and the property that changed hands functioned symbolically to affirm or deny that relationship. [In contrast] Commerce suggests neutrality. (Geary 1978:199)

In his book, *Furta Sacra*, Geary discusses medieval justification of theft of the relics of saints based on the saint's "participation" in the act. That is, the saint was understood always to have the power to make his or her bones immobile. In choosing not to work a miracle to do so, the saint allows the theft, usually because he or she was dissatisfied by the celebration of cult at the original location of his or her burial. This is surely the radical opposite of neutral exchange that might be represented by commerce.

In discussing the translation of relics from one city to another at a somewhat earlier moment than most of Geary's examples, Paulinus of Nola gives a multivalent explanation of motivations and causes that include commerce. At first Paulinus almost seems to be casting the devotee as a merchant extracting payment for transport. He quickly shifts, however, to other justifications and culminates his commentary



with vivid metaphors of natural dispersal and multiplication that justify and even *insist* upon relic distribution.

Paulinus contends that those trusted with the transport or relics felt justified in taking a bit of the relics for their own use, a sort of relic theft:

The faithful and zealous escorts of the relics were afforded a chance at the prompting of faith to break off some keepsakes from the holy bones as their deserved reward, so that they could individually bear back home for their personal protection the reward for their service and the payment of their toil. (Walsh 1975:143)

This practice of dismembering or breaking the relic, far from being condemned, is cast as a natural act that envisions the relics as a sort of sustenance (Paulinus does at one point call Felix his “bread” [Walsh 1975:292]), and mimics the scattering of seeds by birds: “the sacred ashes have been scattered over different areas like life-giving seeds... the drops of ashes have begotten rivers of life.” Rather than an immoral act, the theft of relics thus becomes an act inspired by God, explicitly through the “prompting of faith.”

In a continuation of such metaphorical implications, rather than dead and quiescent remains, Paulinus and others describe relics as part of the still-living world and thus able to reproduce themselves. They are able to do this in terms of contact relics — oil, perfume or cloths that are allowed to touch the body and gain a measure of sanctity — but they also “reproduce” more immediately. They make gifts of themselves.

Paulinus tells of an occasion at the tomb of Felix when, “those who had bestowed the nard on the tomb prepared to draw it up to apply it to themselves, they found the vessels miraculously filled not with nard but with a heap of dust which burst out from below” (Walsh 1975:192). Rather than the dismaying picture this presents to the modern mind, this miracle was an occasion for joy, for the dust that “burst” forth constituted Felix’s authentic relics. Paulinus clarifies, “those bones of the saint’s body are not choked with the dust of death, but endowed with the hidden seed of eternal life” (Walsh 1975:120). Similarly Gregory of Tours tells us that St. Aredius, returning to his

Limoges abbey with a capsule about his neck with some dust from the grave of St. Martin, witnessed how the contents increased when placed in an oratory and squeezed out of the capsule.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, as above, relics were also exchanged as gifts and as gifts they become a purposeful enactment of ties of friendship and other affiliations. Paulinus received his precious relic of the cross as a gift from the Roman matron Melania and, in turn passed on a fragment to a friend Severus (Wharton 2006:19–20). Unlike earlier forms of Roman gift-giving, especially in the late Antique world, it is notable that women could be involved in the gift-giving and support of foundations that was essential to the cult of saints (Brown 1981:47). Because of such gift-giving, as Brown has noted, relics were not concentrated in a few holy locations such as Jerusalem or Rome but instead were spread throughout Christendom in the Late Antique world (as Paulinus poetically claimed like seeds). They “took on the shifting quality of late-Roman social relationships: distances between groups and persons were overcome by gestures of grace and favor” (Brown 1981:89).

As part of social relations, they also found their proper place. Rather than allow them to fall under the unregulated control of private persons and allow the possibility of scandal, from the earliest cult, with a few notable exceptions, relics were brought under the control of the Church. Their closest friends were the clergy (and perhaps royalty) and their behavior and the behavior of those in their company was subject to a strict etiquette — a set of customs and a notion of proper behavior (Brown 1981:33ff).

What were these relics that were subject to such lively exchange? What form did they take? As above, relics were often small, nearly unidentifiable fragments in the form of dust or bone or cloth. It was, again, their provenance or accompanying story that validated them. Sometimes as well, it was the company they kept — they came in association with collections of relics.

For example, when Paulinus sends Severus a bit of the relic of the true cross for his basilica at Primuliacum, he sent along a verse to be used as an inscription:

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<sup>5</sup>) *Hist. Franc.* Lib. VIII c. 15. Cited by Snoek 1995:85.

The revered altar conceals a sacred union, for martyrs lie there with the holy cross. The entire martyrdom of the saving Christ is here assembled — cross, body, and blood of the Martyr, God himself. . . . where the cross is, there too, is the Martyr; for the Martyr's cross is the holy reason for the martyrdom of the saints. (Walsh 1975:151)

The linking of the saints to the sacrifice of Christ through the relic of the cross in “sacred union” is essential to the meaning of the relic. In describing the altar of his own church dedicated to Felix, Paulinus again describes an altar in similar fashion:

Under the lighted altar, a royal slab of purple marble covers the bones of holy men. Here God's grace sets before you the power of the apostles by the great pledges contained in this meagre dust. . . . One simple casket embraces here this holy band, and in its tiny bosom embraces names so great. (Walsh 1975:151)

In this case, rather than focus on sacrifice and martyrdom, Paulinus emphasizes the presence of the grace of the power of the “holy band” of the Apostles. Elsewhere he speaks of the way that a saint in the altar joins with Christ during the mass “when the chaste gift of Christ is devoutly offered there, the fragrance of his soul may be joined to the divine sacrifice” (Walsh 1975:151). A remarkable continuity preserves these ideas of the collective union of saints under the altar throughout the middle ages. Although the general reference is to Revelation 6:9 “souls under the altar,” the reference can also be much more specific. One is reminded of the “slab of purple marble,” porphyry, that protects the gatherings of saints in each of a series of portable altars from the central Middle Ages (Hahn in press).

Let us however, take these ideas one at a time, first considering the relic *in company* and then the relic as *fragment*.

The union or holy band of saints is none other, of course, than a representation of the Court of Heaven. As Victricius of Rouen remarked of his precious collection of relic fragments “So great a multitude of citizens of Heaven . . . so mysterious a unity of heavenly power” (Brown 1981:96). Even Einhard in about 830, praising the powers of Petrus and Marcellinus in a long account of their miracles, notes that saints work together “since those who are believed to have equal merit before God, are thought, and not absurdly [so], to work in common when performing miracles” (Einhard 1993:230–1).

In addition to cases, as above, where Paulinus imagined a company of saints in placing relics in his altar, we will find more often than not that surviving reliquaries contain more than one relic. Renowned reliquaries such as the twelfth-century *Arca Santa* in Oviedo with its Asturian relic cache (Metropolitan Museum of Art 1996:259–60), or Angilbert's reliquaries in early Carolingian Centula achieve their fame in part because of the astounding number of relics that were deposited in them. In a less well known example, in the ninth century, Hrabanus Maurus, abbot of Fulda created a reliquary with which he meant explicitly to imitate the Ark of the Covenant and deposited a multitude of relics in it, but unsatisfied, later added even more (Appleby 1995). Indeed, collecting relics becomes the role of the important ecclesiastics such as Einhard, as bishops and others are responsible for both the saintly foundation and the *ornamenta* of their churches. Similarly, kings and aristocrats have the well-being of their nations and families at interest.

The contemplation of the Court of Heaven seems to have been a meditation encouraged among the faithful, and one that lifted the devotee out of the cares of this world.<sup>6</sup> One thing is clear, as residents of the Heavenly Jerusalem, saints had the ability to carry the prayers of the faithful before the Lord. As such “intercessors,” saints remain in heaven always ready to lend their help. Ambrose wrote about the elevation of Gervase and Protase in 386:

Our eyes were shut, so long as the bodies of the saints lay hidden. The Lord opened our eyes, and we saw the aids wherewith we have been often protected. We used not to see them, but yet we had them. And so, as though the Lord had said to us when trembling, “See what great martyrs I have given you,” so we with opened eyes behold the glory of the Lord, which is passed in the passion of the martyrs, and present in their working. We have escaped, brethren, no slight lead of shame; we had patrons and knew it not.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The Frankish queen Radegund has an interesting history of collecting relics, recreating the court of Heaven as described in her *vita*: Hahn 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Ambrose Letter 22.11. Schaff & Wace 1896. The translation has been modernized by Thomas Head. The electronic version is available through the *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*.

Intercession was an essential part of the importance of relics and allowed their functioning as part of social relations (Brown 1981: chap. 5). One imagines the saints and martyrs both as part of a lively and glittering court life, and as one's own lover or friend.

In contrast to such positive images of social cohesion, relic fragmentation presents a less welcome image. The notion of a fragment of a dismembered body can create a shudder of distaste or even horror in the modern observer. Nevertheless, Peter Brown vividly argues for the central importance of the fragment:

... it is precisely the detachment of the relic from its physical associations that summed up most convincingly the imaginative dialectic... For how better to suppress the fact of death, than to remove part of the dead from its original context in the all too cluttered grave? How better to symbolize the abolition of time in such dead, than to add to that an indeterminacy of space? Furthermore, how better to express the paradox of the linking of Heaven and Earth than by an effect of "inverted magnitudes," by which the object around which boundless associations cluster should be tiny and compact? (Brown 1981:78)

Indeed the literary theorist Susan Stewart also observes that the miniature can be particularly effective in its promise that it might "open itself to reveal a secret life — indeed to reveal a set of actions and hence a narrativity and history outside the given field of perception," and further that when one studies a tiny object, scientific studies document a "compressed time of interiority," a remarkable change in the experience of time (Stewart 1984:54, 66). Such observations precisely match Paulinus' experience of meditating on a relic of the True Cross in its tiny golden capsule, becoming lost in contemplation of the "invulnerable sign" (Walsh 1975:152–4).

Ultimately, one of the most important imaginary notions posited about saints is that, whether represented by whole bodies or fragments, they are fully present both in their relics and in heaven — a presence that allows them to act as messengers of prayers and requests — and because of this double presence relics have a marked liveliness. Seemingly quiescent saints could interrogate demons and the groans of the possessed testified to their living presence as Gregory of Tours writes: "In this way they bring home the presence of the saints of God to human minds, that there should be no doubt that the saints are

present at their tombs” (Brown 1981:109). Dead bodies of saints have pink complexions, relic fragments bleed, and saints even reach out of their tombs to work miracles! (Brown 1981:77). When it comes to the saintly, the categories of living and dead are so flexible that examples exist of relics appropriating bodies as living reliquaries, and living bodies serving as relics (Snoek 1995:29).

This last story once more comes from Paulinus and reveals a great deal about the early attitude toward relics as both *memoria*, and as indexical proof. The story is told in a letter that Paulinus writes to a Roman senator, Macarius. The letter accompanies and introduces a man, Valgius renamed Victor, that Paulinus is sending to the senator as a “spiritual gift,” a phrase that suggests that Valgius as a kind of relic was a treasure greater even than *eulogiae* from the Holy Land or Christ’s footprints in the soil of the Holy Land. As Paulinus conceives it, the reason for Victor’s relic-like status is that, after being abandoned by his ship’s crew at sea during a horrendous storm, the lowly sailor had visions in which Christ and angels spoke to him, renamed him Victor, instructed him how to care for the ship as well as when to sleep and eat, and even once tweaked his ear to awaken him. Paulinus is very impressed with that tweaking and argues that,

...if living proofs in lifeless objects [*eulogiae*] demonstrate the ancient truth for today’s belief, then with what reverence must this man be regarded, with whom God deigned to converse, before whom God’s face was not concealed...? ...Valgius is the living earth on which we see impressed the traces of the Lord’s body, if with the eye of faith and spiritual sight we scrutinize what Christ’s bosom and Christ’s hand have touched in him... [we] touch the tender ear which heavenly fingers pulled when the Lord played His joke. (Walsh 1967:191)

Paulinus even opines that “I have so incessantly fingered his ear, that I have almost worn it away; I should have liked to cut off a part of that... ear, except that such a token [*pignus*] would have meant wounding him!” (Walsh 1967:191). As a relic, there seems to be little difference between a bit of dust or oil and this man, excepting that Valgius/Victor could talk, could tell his own story. But even this was not a significant difference because, although others had to tell their stories, relics always had the ability to “speak,” a quality perhaps most vividly encountered in pilgrim accounts and as a feature of reliquaries.

In turning to documentary material about the context of relics we turn more precisely to issues of the response to relics. In particular, I would contend that reliquaries and their presentation propose a complex instruction of the body and the senses, the teaching of *reverentia*. Details of the development of such conventional behavior is most clearly evident and well-documented in surviving Holy Land pilgrim accounts. Although most of the accounts are bare-bone itineraries, some report vivid stories that speak to a well-developed integration of relics into the Christian imagination. It must be noted, however, that the encounter of pilgrim and relic may have been more immediate and emotional, and was certainly less regulated, than was relic presentation in the later Medieval West.

Once more stories (and their material equivalent — reliquaries) are essential. It is context and story that arouses the interest of the audience and makes the contact with the relic significant and even wondrous. In the milieu of late Antique pilgrimage, contexts could be and were supplied in many forms — spoken words, architectural settings (Frank 2000; and Hahn 1997b), and even simple labels. Gary Vikan has even demonstrated the use of role-playing in which pilgrims, in pious performance, might take on the persona of the Three Magi at the site of the Nativity (Vikan 1990). However, without fail, one particular ceremony, the reading of a story — whether Gospel text or the *vita* of a saint — was always performed at pilgrim sites.

Readings, spiritual preparation, and physical experiences conditioned the faithful to explore the holy sites in their imaginations. Jerome describes the matron Paula at Golgotha as falling before the cross “as if she could see the Lord hanging on it.” At Bethlehem, “with the eyes of faith, she saw a child wrapped in swaddling clothes, weeping in the Lord’s manger.”<sup>8</sup> Paula herself writes to a friend, Marcella, claiming, “As often as we enter [the Lord’s sepulchre] we see the Savior in His grave clothes, and if we linger we see again the angel sitting at His feet, and the napkin folded at His head.”<sup>9</sup> Pilgrim itineraries are

<sup>8</sup>) Jerome *Ep.* 108.9.2 and 108.10 as cited by Frank 2000:106. Frank also mentions that Paula licks and kisses objects she encounters.

<sup>9</sup>) Jerome *Ep.* 46.5 as cited by Frank 2000:107.

presented as programs of successive sights, series of “sensory wonders,” or even visions (Frank 2000:108–13).

As a 4th-century bishop wrote in a homily concerning pilgrim visitors to the Oak of Mamre, the imagination expands even beyond the events of the place:

...with the sight of the holy places, they renew the picture in their thinking, behold [the patriarch Moses] in their minds... reflect... on his descendants... and with the recollection... become spectators [to]... history.<sup>10</sup>

When Paula speaks of “lingering” at the Sepulchre to see more, apparently she seems to be discussing a process in which the vision that she experiences develops gradually and moves to different aspects of the story and its meaning — the piteous body of Christ, the angel messengers, the “relic” testimony of the shroud. Both of these late antique authors cast their discussions and images in conventional enough Biblical terms — these are not mystical visions. Instead, they are visions and visualizations that could be readily encouraged by pictorial imagery and a structuring of the site. However, they only begin with aspects taken in with the corporeal eyes and they progress through the experience of the “eyes of the faith” to become part of the pilgrim’s “thinking.” That is, parts are integrated by the memory — revolved in the mind and portrayed on the “tablets of the heart” (in Gregory the Great’s words; Hahn 2001:49). In the end they serve the soul in a sort of *imitatio Christi*. As Athanasius wrote in the fourth century of the pilgrim experience of a group of nuns:

You have seen the place of the Nativity: he has given birth to your souls anew. You have seen the place of the crucifixion: let the world be crucified to you and you to the world. You have seen the place of the ascension: your minds are raised up.<sup>11</sup>

But we still need to understand more about the parameters of corporeal vision and what it could do for the faithful. Once again, Paulinus

<sup>10</sup> *Hom.* 9.2 (translated in Hunt 1982:103) and cited by Frank 2000.

<sup>11</sup> “Letter to Virgins Who Went and Prayed in Jerusalem and Returned,” 6, ed. by Brakke, *Athanasius*, 294. Cited and discussed by Frank 2000:111.



of Nola sets out the possibilities, forcefully arguing that some use of vision, especially the sight of the relic of the true cross, could be a genuinely powerful and effective means of access to the divine for the faithful in the early Middle Ages.

In his comments on vision, Paulinus insists on a gradation of the powers of looking, one level obtains for the newly converted and another for the fully initiated Christian. He condescendingly allows that the rustics might “gape” at Old Testament frescoes. He justifies his use of the paintings in the basilica he has built at Nola as a substitute for the uncontrolled feasting that generally occurred. Instead of gorging themselves on food, as he says, “they roam around, their unsophisticated minds beguiled in devotion.” In supplying this “eye candy” Paulinus hopes that the paintings would “excite [their] interest by their attractive appearance” but he also expects that they will

...point out and read over to each other the subjects painted... In this way, as the paintings beguile their hunger, their astonishment may allow better behavior to develop in them... as they gape, their drink is sobriety.

He concludes by arguing that, “They have spent their time on the wonders of the place” (Walsh 1975:290–2; Miller 1997). Clearly, these rustic devotees are not looking at relics or reliquaries. Here instead, we are concerned with the general shrine complex that Paulinus has so carefully constructed. The tomb itself has only a simple silver covering, but he has taken care to create a beautiful setting for the spiritual benefit of the devotees. Paulinus’ thoughts on the evocation of devotion and “wonder” through looking do not, by any means, end here. He begins his description of Nola in talking to a fellow bishop. No barely initiated rustic, the bishop too is encouraged to look at the paintings, to “crane your neck a little till you take in everything with face tilted back. The man who looks at these and acknowledges the truth within these empty figures nurtures his believing mind with representations by no means empty” (Walsh 1975:189). Paulinus describes an act of looking that takes an effort and takes time, may even strain the neck a little and cause physical discomfort. At the same moment that he apologizes for the empty figures, he claims that the “representations” are not empty. Just as with the Eastern Fathers, one is looking not with the eyes but with the mind.

Finally, Paulinus reserves for himself a very special kind of looking. In describing the relic of the true cross that he had received from the Jerusalem pilgrim Melania, he recommends yet a third mode of looking. As noted above, his own vision is a meditative gaze accompanied by a multivalent consideration of the symbolism of the “invulnerability of Christ’s sign” — the cross (Walsh 1975:152–4). His vision focuses on a tiny relic and, in response, opens up to the full implications of faith. Perhaps now that he is not looking at “empty figures” but at the true cross, his vision can be meditative, expansive, timeless, and true.

How does this vision work? Paulinus gives us details scattered throughout his writing. Perhaps it is fair to say that his primary concern is the purification of the senses. He describes the potential impact of sight after Baptism — vision that has the potential to reconfigure the soul (Hahn 2001:55). Elsewhere, however, although he uses baptismal imagery, he describes a more difficult process of the hard work of eradicating sin in all its many forms. Only after the soul is cleansed can one use the senses properly: “Once our senses have been cleansed of all that gives rise to wickedness, our Lord Jesus Christ will gladly walk in them: in them as in the five porticoes, will stroll Wisdom...” (Walsh 1967:158). In the *Dialogues*, Gregory the Great argues that true wonders are seen “with spiritual vision, purified with acts of faith and abundant prayers” (Zimmerman 1959:200), and proceeds to describe a vision that Saint Benedict experienced in which he was able to witness the ascension of another saint’s soul to heaven (St. Germanus). During this miracle “all the powers of his mind unfolded, and he saw the whole world gathered up before his eyes in what appeared to be a single ray of light.”<sup>12</sup> This process is similar to what Paulinus described, a close focus followed by an opening up of understanding. It is as if only the small aperture can let in the light. In other words, again, the small size of the relic actually helps to focus the mind of the devout.

Paulinus was privileged enough to possess a personal relic of the true cross. What, in fact, did the average pilgrim really see? Even in the

<sup>12</sup>) Zimmerman 1959:201. This was Benedict watching the soul of Germanus, Bishop of Capua, rise into heaven. See Monfrin 1991:37–49.

East, where the Piacenza pilgrim writes avidly of touching many sacred relics, access was not always granted (Frank 2000:119–20). In writing of the new shrine at Tebessa built by Bishop Alexander in the fourth century, the possibilities of sight are extolled:

Where once long rest had robbed them from our gaze, they blaze with light on a fitting pedestal, . . . From all around the Christian people, young and old, flow in to see them, happy to tread the holy threshold, singing their praises and hailing with outstretched hands the Christian faith. (Brown 1981:37–8)

Characteristically the relics are bathed in light and the faithful are filled with joy in seeing them. But can they really see them? This passage describes a liturgical ceremony filled with chanting and arms uplifted in prayer, not rapt contemplation. The faithful knew that in the center of the new church, the relics were lifted and celebrated, but could they really *see* them?

At the shrine of Thecla in Seleucia devotees had visions of the saint sitting in the center of the church and, indeed she was “visible to all eyes,” even though the shrine *did not possess* the relics of the saint (Dagron 1978:295; and Hahn 1997b). In the West, at the shrine of Saint Peter, if one were lucky enough to be granted the golden keys that unlocked the grille at the tomb, one then had to insert one’s head into a *fenestella* (or small window), presumably into a dark space, to see what? Probably the only visible object was the exterior of the sarcophagus holding the saint (similar to the arrangement reconstructed at Sant-Ambrogio in Milan, Hahn 1999).

Throughout the middle ages, as in these early cases, the faithful almost never had an unobstructed view of relics: grilles intervened, distances were maintained, containers with sheets of gold “like mirrors” deflected the gaze from the relic.<sup>13</sup>

Even if the relic was presented to view, who might be capable of “seeing” relics? This is a question that is raised in a number of contexts: miracles are seen by some but not by others. Commentators insist that to have true visions one must prepare the mind for veneration that allows ascent to a higher level. Gregory of Tours describes the relic in a cross at Bazas as a crystallized drop of divine mercy that fell from the

<sup>13</sup>) Miller 1997, citing Prudentius *Peristephanon*.

vaults to the altar and, “When it is adored will appear crystal clear to a man free from sin; but if as often happens, some evil is attached to the frail human nature of the beholder, appears totally obscure” (Brown 1982). An eleventh-century miracle among those associated with Foi has “innocent” witnesses see a white dove carry off a body part while a criminal sees a black and white magpie (Sheingorn 1995:45). In 957, a Byzantine court official delivered a speech concerning the arm of John the Baptist in which he asked that the arm be “present through your miracle-working and holy hand appearing entire to the worthy, appearing fully visible to the pure of mind and being fully present at all times in this holy sanctuary (the Pharos).” In turn he asks the relic to look and behold the honors of the cult organized in its (his) honor (Kalavrezou 1997:77).

But in a more mundane sense, among the laity, adequate preparation is essential for the sight of relics. In discussing the relics of Constantinople and after sorting the sources and condemning some (the Western ones) as hopelessly confused, George Majeska concludes that certain viewers, in this case, the Russians, “came to Constantinople to see those marks of God’s activity on earth about which they had heard since childhood. Thus they were capable of understanding what they saw” (Majeska 1973:72). It could be said that without long lessons in the meaning of relics, both general and specific, audiences quite literally could not see. It becomes one of the primary tasks of the early Western church to teach congregations how to approach, venerate, and even, *how to see* relics.

Our discussion thus far has for the most part concerned the treatment and status of relics. We have touched briefly on visual representations on the Ottonian reliquaries, but at this moment must delve more deeply into the potential of reliquaries to guide viewers and their perceptions and beliefs.

A first and perhaps most important quality of reliquaries is consonant with questions raised above about the question and propriety of the visibility of relics. That is, reliquaries generally *hide* the relics they contain; *protect* them from profane sight. One might instead imagine that relics were obscured because clerics were overly concerned with ecclesiastical control and safeguarding of relics. Surely these concerns have something to do with the hiding of relics. Another alternative is

aesthetic: in circa 1100 Thiofrid of Echternach, who insists that relic and reliquary are truly a single unit, argues that without the compensatory beauty of the reliquary, a relic could be repulsive (Ferrari 1996:xxiii, xxvii; and Ferrari 2005). Ultimately, however, in the widely scattered and disparate comments about reliquaries, the most common approach asserts that relics should not be seen, indeed that proper decorum insisted that they should never be exposed to improper touch or display.

Again stories will help us to understand (just as they helped medieval viewers). A fifth- or sixth-century miracle story concerns a relic of the true cross obtained by St. Peter the Iberian, encased in wax, then wrapped in linen, and finally enclosed in a cassette of gold. On feast days and Sundays, Peter opened the case to adore the relic, but when a young “cubiculaire” did so, the relic turned into a white dove and flew from the palace. Peter was forced to search out a replacement (Frolow 1961:35). The ability of the relic to disguise (or transform) itself and move of its own volition in the miracle is striking but perhaps the foremost message of the miracle is that relics were not to be approached in simple curiosity, especially by those without qualifications.

Gregory the Great commented on the Byzantine custom of kissing and touching relics: “For in the Roman and all the western parts it is unendurable and sacrilegious for anyone by any chance to desire to touch the bodies of saints: and, if one should presume to do this, it is certain that his temerity will by no means remain unpunished. For this reason we greatly wonder at the custom of the Greeks, who say that they take up the bones of saints; and we scarcely believe it.”<sup>14</sup>

Gregory is probably stating an extreme position here, only clearly established at a relatively late date (Gregory writes in the sixth century), but such reluctance to touch comes to be an important and enduring difference between the Eastern and Western approaches to relics.

A reluctance to touch relics and reliquaries is first of all grounded in the Bible and the Biblical prototype of reliquaries, the Ark of the

<sup>14</sup>) Gregory the Great *Epistolae*, iv.30, *MGH Epp.* i, 265; trans. and cited Crook 2000:23.

Covenant. In 2 Samuel 6:6–7, touching is explicitly condemned with the most extreme of punishments:

And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. (Also in I Chron 13:9–10)

In reaction, David is frightened and reluctant to move the Ark but finally, when he does so, he follows a protocol where the Ark is celebrated with music, dancing, and sacrifices. Furthermore, the king departs from royal decorum and publicly humbles himself before the Ark by dancing (to the scorn of his wife Michal). Finally, he places the Ark in the carefully prepared space of the Tabernacle.

Miracles associated with processions from the high middle ages recounted by Pierre Sigal, again carry a message that the improper approach to relics can cause serious injury or death (Sigal 1976). Other examples tell of holy fire threatening unapproved viewers (Schrade 1960:38), as well as blindness or paralysis (Dierkens 1999). The exception that proves the rule is the ritual humiliation of relics in which the relics were “exposed.” However, such rituals would not have their impact if they had not been profoundly shocking to sensibilities that had learned a certain sort of *reverentia* toward relics.

Where were relics hidden from view? At first they were concealed in altars. As Paulinus of Nola writes of St Clarus, “It is right that a pure altar covers your body so that God's altar may conceal the temple of Christ.”<sup>15</sup> The reference to the saint's body as a temple may recall the Jewish Temple and biblical sanctions against anyone other than priests entering the Holy of Holies where Jewish “relics” were kept in the ark of the covenant. References to the body as temple shift later in the middle ages and, in the early thirteenth century, Sicardus of Cremona “compared the church building to the heart of man ‘who is the temple of God’ (I Cor 3:17), and the placing of the Eucharist and the relics in

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<sup>15</sup>) Letter 32.6, Trout 1999:140. And even when placing in the altar, they were shielded from view by veils: Michaud 1999:204, citing the Romano-Germanic Pontifical.

the altar as the closing up of God's commands and the example of the saints in his heart so that he can sincerely claim: 'Thy word I have hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee' (Ps 119:11).<sup>16</sup> Referring to the same text of Psalms, Durandus of Mende, also in the thirteenth century wrote: "We hide these relics in a *capsa*, so as to imitate holding them [the saints] in our heart."<sup>17</sup>

These examples emphasize that the interior of the heart (or the altar or reliquary) is the place to keep religious truths and treasures. A slightly different analogy of reliquary to body, from Thiofrid of Echternach at the turn of the twelfth century, compares the wonder of the soul enclosed in the body to the wonders of miracles performed by "dust." He writes:

As the soul itself in the body cannot be seen and yet works its wonders therein, so the precious treasury of dust [relics] works unseen... Who with fast faith touches the outside of the container whether in gold, silver, gems, or fabric, bronze, marble, or wood, he will be touched by that which is concealed inside.<sup>18</sup>

Thiofrid's assertion that touching the exterior of the relic container is efficacious obviates any necessity to see or touch the relic itself.

Although Thiofrid's list of the possible materials of reliquaries includes everything from wood to marble and fabric to various metals, the overwhelming number of references to reliquaries in medieval sources specify *gemmis et auro*, that is made "of gems and gold." Robert Favreau traces the phrase to Ovid and notes that it indicates a product of the very highest quality (Favreau 2003:331 n. 36). The materiality of reliquaries cannot be overstated. At this point, suffice it to say that precious materials reflect honor upon relics and, of course, condition their reception by viewers. A rough hierarchy of materials includes, of course, at the top gold and gems, with their biblical associations with heaven. In close proximity are ivory, throughout antiquity associated

<sup>16</sup> "*In altari corpus Domini et reliquias ponere, est mandata Domini et exempla sanctorum memoriter retinere, ut possit dici...* PL 213, 36 *Mitrale* Lib 1, c. 10, cited and discussed by Snoek 1995:190.

<sup>17</sup> Haec [reliquiae] in capsula recondimus, cum ad imitandum ea in corde retinemus. Durandus *Rationale* 34 lib I c.7. n 23; cited by Snoek 1995:191 n. 96.

<sup>18</sup> Thiofrid II, 3; cited by Angenendt 2002:132ff.

with the body, and crystal, considered the most pure of substances and also associated with heaven.

However, in addition to materials and their associations, reliquaries have other physical qualities that contribute to their meaning. In terms of the imaginative perception of relics, which as Patricia Cox Miller emphasizes is essential to their spiritual understanding, relics are physically distinguished as giving off light, a quality apparent in many of the quotations above. This light is not stable but one that flickers, flashes, and coruscates, in short, is incandescent (Miller 1997). Augustine argued that Stephen's relics brought a healing "light to the whole world" (Miller 1997:233) using a particularly telling metaphor.<sup>19</sup> However, both poetic evocations such as descriptions in Prudentius and Fortunatus, as well as more prosaic miraculous accounts describe relics and reliquaries as literally glowing or shining with light.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps it is not surprising therefore that numerous reliquaries take a "lantern" or tower shape such as the example from Conques (Gaborit-Chopin & Taburet-Dalahaye 2001:46–9). The "windows" of such lanterns allowed light to come *out* rather than the gaze to penetrate *inward*. Finally, relics and reliquaries are typically honored with "lights," that is lighted candles and lamps that often are burned continuously or over specified periods of time in devotion to the saint (Dendy 1959). Arnold Angenendt treats the light-producing quality of relics extensively (Angenendt 1997).

In her treatment of the rhetorical consideration of relics, Miller goes yet further in invoking the importance of the work of the imagination, casting it in terms of an aesthetics that transforms relics from bones and dust to beauty and power. In discussing *ekphrasis*, a form of rhetorical description that attempts to evoke the sensations and emotions of the viewer rather than merely describe things in the world, Miller argues that in Asterius's 410 *ekphrasis* at the martyrdom of Saint Euphemia in Asia Minor, the viewer is "positioned as an active participant in the creation of an aesthetics of relics" (Miller 1997:222; Mango

<sup>19</sup> Dronke 2003 dedicates a chapter to the use of fire and light as imaginative images in early medieval texts.

<sup>20</sup> Fortunatus describes the arm of Martin: De Nie 1997; Frolow 1961:82, 84, notes accounts of crosses glowing.



1972:37–9). In other words, aesthetics become part of the imaginative understanding of what relics mean. The work, the text, is essentially unfinished and the *rhetor* calls upon the listener and viewer to complete it. I would argue that reliquaries often work in precisely the same fashion, or contribute to this understanding.

The beauty of a reliquary does not, therefore, only function to honor the saint, and mediate the “ugliness” of the relic; it also takes part, along with the beauty of the liturgy, the shrine, hymns, poems, and prayers, in creating or *constructing* the saint and his or her spiritual meaning for (and by) the viewer. Thus beauty is an inalienable and required quality of reliquaries, but rather than being taken for granted as intrinsic to materials or craftsmanship it was actively sought as an experience. As Peter Brown evocatively describes such artistic effort, it is concerned with the making of

...a carefully maintained crescendo of beauty in poetry, in ceremonial, and in shimmering art around a new and obsessive theme... [Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus] turned the *summum malum* of physical death preceded by suffering into a theme into which all that was most beautiful and refined in their age could be compressed. (Brown 1981:85)

At a later moment in the middle ages, to return to where we began, Egbert of Trier (c. 980) turned what is perhaps the ugliest part of the body, the foot, into the “beautiful... feet of [the Apostles] who bring good news of good things!” (Romans 10:15 above fig. 2). He accomplished this transformation as the active patron of one of the most renowned artistic workshops of the day, seeking out new forms of expression for reliquaries. A contemporary praises him for his “grand and celebrated ingenuity” in the use of enamels and the employment of superior artists, and notes that the resulting “admirable form” pleased both “eye and spirit.”<sup>21</sup> So in addition to winning the admiration of his fellows and eliciting requests from them for *ornamenta* for their own churches, Egbert succeeded in the most important of

<sup>21</sup>) *Exiguam materiam nostram magnum ac celebre ingenium vestrum nobilitabit, cum adjectione vitri, tum compositione artificis elegantis;... destinato operi designatas mittimus species... admirabilem formam et quae mentem et oculos pascat frater efficiat fratri.* Lettres de Gerbert 104:97 as cited by Lesne 1936:183.

aesthetic challenges. He was able to create beauty out of ugly things, beauty that pleased both the “eye and spirit.”

Hiltrud Westermann-Angerhausen has argued that Egbert set out to impress his fellow clerics and win prestige for his archbishopric specifically through the making of beautiful artworks, principally beautiful manuscripts and the striking reliquaries we have discussed at the beginning of this chapter. She casts Countess Gertrude’s efforts at Braunschweig in much the same light. I would add that as much as fulfilling a desire for political prestige, these patrons were seeking spiritual credit through their contributions to the *ornamenta ecclesiae*, the beautification of the church. A similar effort could be traced in the artistic patronage of Bishop Bernward of Hildesheim, Abbot Wibald of Stavelot and Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis, as well as of course, Paulinus of Nola. In other words, the efforts of these renowned patrons to honor the saints of their churches served simultaneously as the engine of artistic innovation and creativity. Perhaps we will have to consider reliquaries to be works of art after all.

It is only in an age that admits that artwork can interact with the viewer, however, that reliquaries can indeed be considered art, for there is surely no doubt that relics and reliquaries act and interact.<sup>22</sup> Above we have noted that relics are “lively” and give “gifts” to those who pray to them, gifts of miracles, healing and even conversion. Also above, relics and reliquaries were shown to give off light, reassuring the faithful of their power and presence. Perhaps most striking to the modern mind, however, is the claim that relics (and reliquaries) had the ability to speak and some reliquaries even elicit speech from their devotees, in a process that seeks to teach the faithful Christian truths.<sup>23</sup> With this approach the reliquary has moved from the passive object of the gaze to the speaking subject of its own story. Perhaps this is not surprising given that reliquaries seem have been almost what one could call “restless.” They were lifted, gestured with, carried in processions, opened, and closed. They, like the relics, had a life of their own.

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<sup>22</sup>) Freedberg 1989 might be credited with initiating this era for art historians.

<sup>23</sup>) See my forthcoming book on reliquaries, *Strange Beauty*.

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## Buddha-Relics in the Lives of Southern Asian Politics<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Drawing on literary and inscriptional evidence from Sri Lanka and mainland South-east Asia, this essay examines the place of Buddha-relics — potent traces of a Buddha — in the life cycle of southern Asian political formations. In the formation of new polities and/or new dynasties, relics were drawn into the physical landscape and literary memory of the state, in order to provide protection and to claim desirable lineage and authority. At times of heightened military and political activity, when kingdoms were at risk, the protection and deployment of relics, and their ritual engagement, formed part of the state's central technologies. During periods of victory and restoration, relic festivals and the enhancement of a landscape embedded with relics, were used to display, affirm, and protect the royal court.

### Keywords

Buddhism, relics, kingship, courtly culture, ritual landscape

### Introduction

The landscape of the southern Buddhist world — including the states we now know as India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia — is heavily and splendidly marked by domes and towers built to protect and celebrate the potent relics of a dead Buddha or exemplary Buddhist teacher. This built landscape carries the stories of such

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<sup>1</sup>) I am grateful to Kevin Trainor for helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay. I have lightly revised the translations provided in editions of *Mahāvamsa*, *Cūlavamsa*, and *Jinakālamāli* published by the Pali Text Society. Citations are given to the Pāli editions.

powerful figures. In turn, their stories and spaces are often drawn into connection with local and regional histories of monastic culture and of courtly rule. The sites on which relics have been installed thus form powerful locations. These are arenas for the work of memory<sup>2</sup> and for the anticipation of better futures for individuals or groups of Buddhists, imagined as part of family, clan, region, state, and beyond. Today, relic sites are centers of pilgrimage and ritual action, visited by those who seek access to protective power, as well as assistance with ritual remembrance and mental purification. Those who have taken refuge in the Triple Gem of Buddha, *dhamma* (teachings), and *saṅgha* (the monastic community) therefore often seek proximity to the traces of the Buddha and, sometimes, his monks. In addition, relic sites are deeply social spaces offering more than one kind of ease. At a relic monument, someone inclined towards the Triple Gem will generally find an aesthetically pleasing and emotionally comforting space for ritual, a respite from some daily cares, and, perhaps, the chance to frolic a little outside the confines of home and work. In earlier days, when southern Asian Buddhist communities outside the founding center of northeast India and Nepal were beginning to conceive of themselves as participants in the broader sphere of *Buddha-sāsana* (Buddhist teachings, monastic teachers, and institutions), relic installations carried a still heavier weight of power and memory. Relic monuments were at the heart of local moves to emplot centers of ritual and remembrance within a highly charged cosmic and regional map of foundational and paradigmatic Buddhist activity. Buddha relics connected local Buddhist sites and persons to the magical auspiciousness of a fully enlightened teacher. The relics themselves were not the only means of connection. The relic monuments in which they were placed, and the temple complexes within which these were created, also copied elements from exemplary temple centers in the Indic Buddhist heartland. They thus constituted visual arguments (Blackburn 2007) that linked newer local places and events to highly valued earlier moments in Buddhist history. The idealized spaces in India, Nepal, and (slightly later) Laṅkā, associated with the 5th-century BCE biography of Sakyamuni Buddha and the life story of the powerful Indian

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<sup>2</sup> See Hallisey 1996; Trainor 1997; and Berkwitz 2004, 2007.



king and Buddhist patron Asoka (3rd c. BCE) were copied onto Buddhist landscapes in a growing southern Asian Buddhist *ecumene* that encompassed much of what we now know as Southeast Asia. Such visual arguments were reinforced (and sometimes inspired) by written and oral texts that celebrated connections between local landscapes and heroes, an Indic Buddhist center, and the extended biographies of Buddhas in the world.<sup>3</sup>

There is much to be said about the movement of relics within this Buddhist cosmopolis,<sup>4</sup> the stories associated with them, and the roles that relics have played and continue to play in the lives of individuals and collectives. This essay aims to address just one small piece of this rich history, focusing on some broad patterns in the relationship between potent traces of Sakyamuni Buddha and the life cycle of southern Asian political formations between the 12th and 20th centuries. This preliminary account may be of interest to scholars of religion who wish to draw cases from the Buddhist world into their comparative work on relics, as well as to historians of southern Asia seeking to understand the logic of relic-related practices evinced by historical records. We shall see that, in the formation of new polities and/or new dynasties, relics were drawn into the physical landscape and literary production of the royal court and its closely associated Buddhist monastic lineages. They provided ritual-magical protection and buttressed claims to rightful rule. In times of heightened military and political activity, when polities or dynasties were at risk, the protection, enhancement, and deployment of relics constituted a core technology of state. At moments of victory and celebration, or restoration, relic festivals and the embellishment of a relic-filled landscape affirmed the royal court, enlivening once again spaces of protection and merit-making. Celebratory lineage texts and local histories of potent landscape lie at the heart of our evidence for the lives of relics in Buddhist

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<sup>3</sup>) Such texts included *vaṃsa* and other lineage texts written in Pāli and local literary languages which often celebrate the power of relics in relation to Buddha biography and Sakyamuni Buddha's own aspirations and predictions for potent landscape and relic access. See, for instance, Walters 2000; Strong 2004; Trainor 1997; and Berkwitz 2004, 2007.

<sup>4</sup>) A term chosen partly to evoke Pollock's rich treatments of a Sanskrit cosmopolis (Pollock 1996, 1998, 2006).

politics during most of the periods examined by this essay. Such narratives may be read in conjunction with epigraphic, archaeological, and art historical remains in order to gain a richer and more precise sense of how relics entered the lives of local and regional Buddhist worlds. These lineage texts and local histories of landscape were typically written in competitive celebration of local (i.e. royal, clan, or monastic) power and authority, and as narrative affirmations of unfolding karmic causality within the vast temporal and geographic expanse of *Buddha-sāsana*.<sup>5</sup> As such, they are not best read narrowly as evidence for an event-history but, rather, as texts that reveal to us patterns in the valuation of action, how transformative power was ascribed to persons and objects, and the ways in which ambitious individuals (such as kings, queens, monks, and courtiers) and collectives (such as monasteries, clans, families, and city-states) linked their fortune to the creation and celebration of potent landscapes.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, an important dimension of the history of Buddhism in southern Asia is the proliferation of *vamsas* and other lineage texts that provided models for action, recording and augmenting a repertoire from which one could conceive of the work of kingship and monasticism.

## Beginnings

A 6th-century Buddhist historical narrative composed in Pāli from the royal city of Anurādhapura (in Laṅkā, now Sri Lanka) contains a paradigmatic account of what a properly Buddhist royal city must contain. Several chapters of *Mahāvamsa* are devoted to the arrival of Buddhist monks to the island of Laṅkā in the 3rd century BCE. Emissaries from the royal court of King Asoka, in northeast India, they reached the Lankan seat of power held by King Devānampiyatissa. Impressed by the physical splendor, the preaching, and the supernormal powers of

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Collins 1990, 1998; Walters 2000; Strong 2004; and Blackburn 2001.

<sup>6</sup> I take much inspiration from Collins' insightful work (1998) on the Pāli *imaginaire*, and am grateful for continued conversations with him about how we may write pre-modern histories of southern Asian Buddhism on the basis of such textual materials. Inden *et al.* 2000 on a "dialogical" reading of South Asian texts has also shaped my thinking.

the monks who traveled through the air, landing at the hilltop named Mahintale after their leader, the Lankan king prepared to make them welcome. *Mahāvamsa* recounts that this involved recreating the physical space of the royal capital, Anurādhapura, so that it would contain the elements required of a city that participated in the wider Buddhist world of the *sāsana*. A monastery for the new arrivals was prepared for them in a royal pleasure garden, at a suitable distance from the heart of urban life. From the quaking of the earth and other portents that occurred when the monastery was offered by the king, Mahinda is said to have recognized that the location had been inhabited earlier by Buddhist monks, during prior dispensations of Buddhas who taught long before the most recent Buddha Sakyamuni. As Mahinda toured the vicinity of the pleasure garden, he highlighted for the king the sites at which Buddha relics were to be installed during the king's reign. Possessed of an unusually deep temporal knowledge born of his Buddhist attainments, the monk recognized locations that had been rendered auspicious by the visits of prior Buddhas. *Mahāvamsa* reports Mahinda's celebratory recollection of the arrival of Buddhas and relics in three prior Buddha-dispensations, as well as Sakyamuni Buddha's visit to spaces in the royal city.

Thus was this place, O king, frequented by four Buddhas. On this spot, O great king, there will be a relic monument [*thūpa*] in the future, with a relic-chamber for a measure of the Buddha's bodily relics... (*MV* 15:166–7)

Mahinda went on to teach the king how to establish properly the *dhamma* in the king's realm. For a Buddha's teaching to be established in the royal city, it was necessary to establish monastic ritual enclosures. Without these it would be impossible to conduct the monastic ceremonies required to perpetuate the *saṅgha* through ordination and purification, and the work of preaching. Buddhist monks and their lineages were not, however, sufficient to establish Anurādhapura within the Buddha-*sāsana*. This required relics of Sakyamuni Buddha.

The arrival of relics to vitalize the newly Buddhist city with protective power and a suitable devotional focus is recounted vividly and elaborately in *Mahāvamsa*. Parts of Sakyamuni Buddha's corporeal remains after cremation, plus his right collar bone and his alms bowl, eventually reached Laṅkā, thanks to the generosity of King Asoka and

Sakka, king of the gods. The relics were tested for authenticity and a suitable monument prepared for their installation. Only then, under perfect conditions, in accordance with the prediction of Sakyamuni Buddha himself, the relic

rose up in the air from the elephant's back. Floating in the air and visible at the height of seven *tālas*, astonishing the people, it accomplished the hair-raising miracle of the double appearances, as did the Buddha at the base of the Gaṇḍambe [tree]. And by the rays of light and streams of water pouring down from it at once, all the land of Laṅkā was completely illuminated and anointed. (17:43–5)

According to this *vaṃsa*, bringing to life a Buddhist city involved creating connections to what had been done in earlier periods of Buddhist history, fulfilling the expectations of Sakyamuni Buddha as well as the Buddhas who preceded him.<sup>7</sup> That is, one important element in this vitalization of Buddhist space was the evocation of deep temporal associations that imbued present spaces and actions with the authority of the past. In this sphere, the propriety and efficacy of actions taken in the present depended not on originality but on a narrative logic of replication and fulfillment.<sup>8</sup> *Mahāvamsa* foregrounds the role of the *saṅgha* in this fulfillment: Mahinda is depicted as both a ritual expert and as the repository of the deep historical memory required to guide the king towards the receipt of transformative power.

Through acts of physical construction, and by narrating these acts of construction in elite royal and monastic lineage texts composed in Pāli or local literary languages, new Buddhist cities (and other sites) gained a cosmic pedigree. Spatial connections to idealized past models were also crucial, as we see from the elaborate detail with which *Mahāvamsa* recounts the arrival in Anurādhapura of the *bodhi* tree, part of the tree under which Sakyamuni Buddha had attained his full enlightenment. Thanks to the magical power and merit-making of King Asoka, he and his contemporary, the Lankan King Devānampiyatissa, were able to possess simultaneously the great *bodhi*

<sup>7</sup>) On which see further, for instance, Walters 2000 and Brown 1988.

<sup>8</sup>) On which see further, *inter alia*, Blackburn 2007; Collins 1998; Derris 2000; Griswold 1957, 1965; Mus 1935; Reynolds and Reynolds 1982; and Tambiah 1976.

tree in two manifestations (18:33–67). The tree brought to Laṅkā mapped the physical site of Sakyamuni's enlightenment, and a piece of Asoka's domain, onto Lankan land. The core of the northern Buddhist heartland was thus copied in the southern island, bringing Lankans local access to the transformative power of the tree of enlightenment.<sup>9</sup>

As soon as it was freed from [the king's] hand, it rose up eighty cubits into the air, and remaining there released beautifully auspicious rays of six colors... Ten thousand persons, who were filled with confidence in the context of this miracle, gaining insight and attaining to enlightenment, received here novitiate monastic ordination...

When the great Bodhi-tree was established [on land], all the people who had gathered together, made it offerings of perfumes, flowers and so forth, all around. (19:44–50)

In the late 13th century, a new city of Chiang Mai (in present-day Thailand) was constructed at the behest of King Mangrai (r. 1281–1317). Mangrai aimed to integrate clan-based principalities of the north into a city-state (*muang*), with Chiang Mai as the center of governance and court ritual. Through military action and strategic alliances, Mangrai began to develop control from Chiang Mai. The emergent strength of the Chiang Mai state did not outlast Mangrai's death. By the late 14th century, however, in the reign of King Kü Nā (r. 1367–1385), Chiang Mai achieved a more enduring power as the capital of a city-state with regional imperial ambitions (Wyatt 2003:65, Dhīda 1982:101). Like the model king of Laṅkā, Devānampiyatissa, King Kü Nā sought to initiate a fresh monastic lineage in the region, partly as an expression of Buddhist royal prowess and devotion. Introducing this monastic line was also a way to garner for Chiang Mai the ritual and magical resources available to Buddhist monks, in the hope that Chiang Mai's power might lastingly outstrip its erstwhile rival city in the region, Haripuṇjaya. A local lineage text composed subsequently, *Jinakālamālī*, reports that, after several false starts, King Kü Nā's court brought to Chiang Mai from Sukhothai the Buddhist monk Sumana, esteemed for his links to the forest-dwelling (*arañṇavāsī*) lineage of Lankan monks. Sumana stood to benefit Chiang Mai not only

<sup>9</sup> See also Trainor 1997.

through lineage and education,<sup>10</sup> but with ritual and protective magic as well. For Sumana had access to a Buddha-relic discovered near Sukhothai.

[t]he Elder Sumana . . . taking with him his excellent relic accompanied the royal emissary to the city of [Chiang Mai]. And then when the noble Elder had left the city of Sukhodaya, at every rest the excellent relic of the Sage [Buddha], wonderfully lustrous, performed various superb miracles. (Ratanapañña 1962:86)

Sumana's relic was installed at Kü Nā's royal temple complex (91); his monastic heirs and their later rivals helped to shape new traditions of regional historical memory. These literatures celebrated a landscape marked and protected by relics and relic monuments installed on sites said to have been rendered auspicious long ago, during Sakyamuni Buddha's visits to the north.<sup>11</sup> The story of Sumana reminds us of the delicate interdependence between monks and kings that characterized the flow and use of relics. Any well-placed monastic could enter into reciprocal exchange with the royal court, offering sermons and access to merit-making while accepting food and other monastic requisites, such as robes and lodging. In addition, however, some Buddhist monks were "translocal celebrities,"<sup>12</sup> whose fame, expertise, and access to potent objects offered unusual benefits to any ruler whose patronage they accepted (or were forced to accept). The formation and maintenance of royal power expressed in a Buddhist idiom depended upon monastic participation in donative and protection rituals, including those focused on relic monuments. Monks who resided in royal monasteries, or who benefited in other ways from royal largesse and land grants, were naturally bound to the king and other court elites (royal supporters, and royal rivals) through intricate connections.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See further Veidlinger 2006.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, *Jinakālamālī* (Ratanapañña, ed. Buddhadatta 1962, trans. Jayawickrema 1968), *Cāmadevīvaṃsa* (Swearer and Sommai, eds. and trans., 1998), Swearer *et al.* 2004.

<sup>12</sup> A useful and evocative term proposed by Steven Collins, personal communication, February 2009.

<sup>13</sup> There is a vast literature on "Buddhism and kingship." See note 14 below for a list of references most directly related to royal Buddhist ideology in the locations discussed here, as well as Gunawardhana 1979 and Aung-Thwin 1985. Note also the bibliography in Collins 1998.

## Threats

A few generations after Mangrai began to shape Chiang Mai as a royal city in expression of his regional political ambitions, King Tilakarāja (r. 1441/2–1487) took the throne in tumultuous times. Forcing the abdication of his father with the help of an ambitious courtier who aspired to regency powers, Tilakarāja had to act carefully to establish himself locally at a time when Chiang Mai politics neared the chaos of “civil war” (Wyatt 2003:66–8). King Tilakarāja followed a growing history of Buddhist precedent in Laṅkā and mainland Southeast Asia, altering the ritual and devotional landscape of his royal capital in order to improve his political fortunes. To better control the monastic communities that functioned as important brokers in the delicate world of Chiang Mai politics, Tilakarāja brought their ordination rituals under more direct royal control within a new royally sponsored ritual enclosure. However, according to the statesman’s logic of his day, Tilakarāja needed more than control over the high levels of monastic and non-monastic administration in Chiang Mai. Faced with local unrest, as well as growing military threat from the south-central Siamese city-state of Ayutthaya, it was time for the new Chiang Mai monarch to draw on the full range of state technologies at his disposal.<sup>14</sup> Military campaigns against Ayutthaya occurred intermittently, as did diplomatic negotiations between the two states, each one led by a ruler with regional imperial ambitions. Preparations for military action and steps taken to protect the royal city included alterations to the Buddhist landscape of Chiang Mai, and made use of the work of ritual.

Tilakarāja enhanced the city’s central relic monument, Wat Jedi Luang through a series of dramatic changes. First raising and embellishing the central spire of the monument, Tilakarāja went on to deposit a new Lankan Buddha relic there. The Emerald Buddha, a Buddha image celebrated for its beauty and power, was removed from the nearby city of Lampāng and placed in the heart of Tilakarāja’s royal city (Likhit Likhitamonta 1980:75; Hazra 1982:161).

From the year of the commencement of the Royal Spire right up to its completion, there was a miracle of one kind or another. Again and again, by means of

<sup>14</sup> See further Blackburn 2007 and the bibliography provided there.

the relic's potency [*tejena*], the great earth quaked. And when the Royal Spire was completed... the Lord Tilaka brought from the city of [Lampāṅ] the Jewel-Image, possessed of potent magical power without limit [*aparimitena tejiddhikaṃ*] and installed it there at the Royal Spire itself. (Ratanapañña 1962:99)

Such additions to the city supplemented the ritual-magical power of the king and his realm. Under King Tilakarāja's rule, only the king had access to the Emerald Buddha, and the relics at Wat Jedī Luang were deposited inside a special royal tower (Dhīda 1982:142, 169).

In addition to this work at Wat Jedī Luang, the king embarked on other massive merit-making projects to improve his present-day fortunes as well as his rebirth prospects. After renovating a Buddhist temple in honor of his parents, he went on to build a new Buddhist temple complex that was intended to serve as a repository for an edited and "purified" recension of the Buddhist canon (*tipiṭaka*) and as his own death memorial site. His new temple copied elements of Sakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment site onto Chiang Mai soil, repeating the logic of spatial copying that had characterized the first generation of southern Buddhist expansion at Anurādhapura, and imbuing the city with additional ritual power. As construction of the new temple began, Tilakarāja uprooted Chiang Mai's leading *bodhi* tree from its first location at Doi Suthép, bringing it within the confines of the new temple, and thus more closely connected to the royal seat of power (Blackburn 2007). Like its arboreal relative at Anurādhapura, the *bodhi* tree was itself a "relic of use" (*pāribhogika dhātu*), descended from the tree under which Sakyamuni Buddha had achieved enlightenment. The Buddhist worlds of southern Asia carry many stories of relic theft and its anticipation, as well as hostile magic undertaken against powerful Buddhist objects such as relics, prized Buddha images, and even temple sites (Griswold 1957; Narula 1994; Notton, trans. 1932, 1933; Wyatt and Aroonrut 1998; Trainor 1997; Strong 2004). Such stories remind us that for much of the history of this region, the arts of war, statecraft, and diplomacy included ritual technologies and potency practices that harnessed powerful religious signs and objects in the service of men and women of prowess (Wolters 1999; Davidson 2002). Little wonder, then, given the challenges of his reign, that Tilakarāja was preoccupied with the arts of protection in and around Chiang Mai.



When faced with the prospect of invasion, it was a high priority for a king to secure any major relics that were not deeply buried within a relic monument and therefore at risk of capture. Such portable relics, as well as highly prized Buddha images, were typically closely connected to the king and his right to rule (Trainor 1997; Strong 2004; Smith, ed. 1978a, 1978b). They were therefore of particular concern in moments of high military threat. If a royal relic were to fall into rival royal hands, the rival gained an important local symbol of authority that could be deployed in favor of the rival ruler and his polity. Moreover, the loss of a high-potency relic would further weaken the physical and military capacities of a threatened incumbent, who relied upon the relic for magical protection. In the central province of Lañkā, the royal city of Kandy retained political and military independence even as Portuguese and Dutch presence deepened on the island. From the 12th century or so in Lañkā, a tooth relic of Sakyamuni Buddha was central to royal ritual and protective magic. The tooth relic was closely connected to royal power; it served as a palladium of rule (Senviratne 1878:17–20; Strong 2004:193–99). Under Portuguese and then Dutch military threats to Kandy, the Kandyan kings repeatedly removed the relic from the city (CV 95:9–10; 99:122–5). At their accession to the throne, new kings like Vimaladhammasūriya II (r. 1687–1707) affirmed their right to rule by showing ritual homage to the relic and making offerings to it.

Having attained his consecration as king, [Vimaladhammasūriya II] possessing confidence in the teachings and institutions of the Buddha [*pasanno jinasāsane*], prepared in various ways everything for Tooth Relic offerings, etc. For the sake of the Tooth of the Sage-king [Buddha] he erected a lovely three-storeyed palace, glowing with decorations of various kinds. And with twenty-five thousand silver pieces he had made a lovely reliquary, covered with gold and ornamented with the nine precious stones. In this great reliquary that resembled a relic monument of precious stones, he enhanced the Tooth of the Conqueror. (CV 97:4–7)

These offerings, perhaps recorded in *pin pot* or merit books, became an important part of court history. Memories of such royal relic offerings were eventually given full narrative form in lengthy chronicle-cum-lineage texts that celebrated the military, ritual, and devotional lives of kings, high-ranking members of the royal family, and leading

Buddhist monks. Buddhist monks themselves typically wrote such works, often writing simultaneously for court patrons and to secure specific, strategic, monastic visions of past and present. Their authorship reveals yet another way in which kings and court elites intersected with monks in relation to Buddha-relics.

Not long thereafter, another king of Kandy, King Kīrti Śrī Rājasimha (r. 1747–1780) recognized an imminent Dutch invasion of Kandy. At such a perilous moment, the 18th-century *vaṃsa* recalled, protection of the royal tooth relic was vital.

He commissioned the two heirs to the throne to protect the venerable Tooth Relic, the Chief Queen, his sister and the most essential treasures and sent them to a territory little-traveled on account of its mountains, forests and difficult roads. Then the hostile companies, like fierce demonic armies, reached the city and destroyed the sacred books and other things. (99:122–125)

As we shall see, the king survived Dutch aggression. The relic returned to Kandy where ritual focus on the tooth relic became even more intense.

Royal engagement with Buddha relics also occurred outside a king's own royal city. It was not uncommon to undertake pilgrimage to the most famous relic monuments of the realm, in order to fortify the royal stock of merit and gain further magical protection. Pilgrimage, like relic installations and offerings to relics in the urban capital, presumed a royal Buddhist ideology.<sup>15</sup> A ruler's power resulted from, and depended upon, merit-making that accrued from acts of Buddhist devotion to traces of a Buddha, to the *dhamma*, and to the *saṅgha*. Royal ritual traffic with Buddha relics was part of the public performances of rule — it affirmed a right to kingship even as it enhanced this right by adding to the ruler's stock of merit. In addition, according to an implicit hierarchy of potency, the relics most closely associated with a Buddha offered the richest storehouse of magical power that could be deployed to protect the royal person, his family, and his realm (Trainor 1997:98; Brown 1988:104). Royal pilgrimage was a dramatic act of kingship, usually involving the procession of a royal

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<sup>15</sup> On which, see further, *inter alia*, Heine-Geldern 1956; Tambiah 1976; Reynolds 1978; Bardwell Smith, ed. 1978a and b; and Wolters 1999.

retinue and valuable goods. If such pilgrimage offerings required long-distance travel, they were typically made under military escort. A 12th-century Lankan inscription attributed to King Kīrti Nissanka-Malla suggests the tone in which such activities might be celebrated.

Then in the fourth year of his reign he proceeded in royal splendour, surrounded by his fourfold army, to worship the relics at Ruvanvāli-*dāgaba* [relic monument, in Anurādhapura]. As soon as he came in sight of the relic monument, he alighted from his chariot and walked on his royal feet to the Ruvanvāli terrace. Then, as if he were sprinkling sand on the terrace, he scattered pearls, gold and silver and the seven kinds of gems placed so as to fill up the whole space around. (*Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. 2:82)

In the 13th and 14th centuries, the kings of Sukhothai achieved an uneasy regional primacy under threat from both southern and northern polities. They made offerings to Buddha footprints (Strong 2004:89–95) that had been ritually installed at the hilltops encircling the city, effectively making the realm a Buddha-*desa* (Buddha-land). Homage to the footprints was expected to bring good fortune, in life and in rebirth (Blackburn 2007:195–210). An inscription attributed to King Mahā Dhammarāja I (r. 1347–?) extols the wish-fulfilling character of such a footprint relic.

This hill is called Sumanakūṭaparvata... It is so named because (an emissary) went to make impressions of the Footprint of our Lord the Buddha which is stamped on top of Mount Sumanakūṭaparvata in distant Laṅkādvīpa, and brought them to establish on top of this hill so that everyone might get a sight of this imprint of our Lord Buddha's Footsole with the full hundred and eight signs in bright colors and that all divinities [and men] might salute it, honor it and do homage to it. May they [attain] the happy conditions of Buddhahood!

... If anyone climbs up to the top of this Mount Sumanakūṭaparvata and worships the imprint of our Lord Buddha's Footsole with firm faith that these three happy conditions... (can be attained), he will attain them without fail. (Prasert and Griswold 1992:560–1, original editorial additions)

From Kandy, Lankan kings made regular pilgrimages to the most powerful sites on Laṅkā, sites famous for the Buddha's visitations, which had transformed those portions of the island's landscape into relics of use. Such pilgrimage was most common just after accession to the throne, in the face of danger, or when disaster had been narrowly

averted.<sup>16</sup> The 17th-century King Senāratana took refuge at the celebrated Mahiyaṅgaṇa relic monument some miles from Kandy, when Portuguese forces approached his royal city (*CV* 95:12–3). Several reigns later, when the kingdom was more stable but far from confident, king Narēndrasimha (r. 1706–1739) traveled to Mahiyaṅgaṇa four times. On at least two of those occasions he did so “at the head of a great army” to celebrate a festival of offerings (97:27–31). Kīrti Śrī Rājasimha, who faced military pressure from the Dutch as well as an assassination attempt by his own courtiers (Dewaraja 1988; Blackburn 2001), was understandably preoccupied with royal offerings and ritual protection.

Seeking merit the Lord of men traveled to superb Anurādhapura with his retinue. The King made offerings to the bodhi tree and the excellent relic monuments with elephants, and horses, etc., with gold, silver and the like, building up [his record of] skillful actions in various ways. (*CV* 99:36–38)

His pilgrimage journeys took him to the Mahiyaṅgaṇa relic monument as well, and to those relic installations and temples constructed in years past at another older royal city, Pollonāruva (38–40).

Such royal pilgrimage to relic installations was not restricted to the king's own realm. Royal sponsors took advantage of monastic embassies to conduct pilgrimage offerings by proxy far afield. In this way valuable goods from the royal courts of mainland Southeast Asia found their way to Laṅkā, which was a highly prized pilgrimage destination owing to the island's powerful relic sites. When King Dhammaceti sponsored a monastic mission to Laṅkā from Pegu (southern Burma) in the 15th century, he sent massive offerings to the Kandyan Tooth Relic and other major relic sites with them (Hazra 1982:110–1). Three hundred years later, when Siamese Buddhist monks reached Kandy on a royal mission to establish a new monastic lineage on the island, they had instructions to make a pilgrimage tour of Laṅkā on behalf of the Ayutthayan royal court and leading monks, at a time of unrest in the court (Wyatt 2003:113–4).

<sup>16</sup> See also Seneviratne 1978.

Since the royal envoys wished to offer devotion to the Mahiyaṅgaṇa relic monument and other relic monument sites, [the Lankan king] sent them here and there with Lankan officials, having them offer devotion as they pleased, and then sent them home after correctly offering them appropriate assistance. (CV 100:125–127)

Regional royal pilgrimage and ritual offerings by proxy remained central to Buddhist statecraft well into the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Laṅkā, Burma, Siam, and Cambodia all felt the heavy burden of French and British colonial presence in the region. The royal courts of Burma and Cambodia sought to manage the British and French, respectively, through diplomatic channels, succumbing to a series of unequal treaties. By the middle of the 1880s the balance of power was fully in favor of the European powers. Although the Siamese managed to contain European power to some extent, and engaged in regional colonial projects of their own (Loos 2006; Thongchai 1994), their Buddhist *confrères* were less fortunate. The Burmese court at Mandalay fell to the British in 1885, after which King Thibaw was exiled to India.<sup>17</sup> Members of the Burmese court and inhabitants of leading Buddhist monasteries in Mandalay relocated to towns in southern Burma. At nearly the same time, in 1884, the Cambodian court was forced to accept deeply intrusive administrative ‘reforms’ under French colonial oversight, which gave the French control over the courts and taxation, among other aspects of administration (Hansen 2007).

In these bleak years, the royal courts of Burma and Cambodia sharply accelerated their pilgrimage offerings to Lankan relic installations, focusing on the Tooth Relic at Kandy, with supplementary offerings to sites such as Mahiyaṅgaṇa and Śrī Pada that were also associated with the protective power of Sakyamuni Buddha (Blackburn 2010). After the deposition of King Thibaw, for instance, the Burmese Queen reached Laṅkā in 1889. She led a massive embassy comprised of 100 lay people and 46 monks, headed for Kandy and the other major relic installations on the island (Buddhadatta 1960:196; Buddhadatta 1952:84). Only a few years later, in February 1892, a high-ranking Burmese monk Vajirārāma, one of the leading monks supported by

<sup>17</sup> On which see also the richly detailed novel by Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* (2000).

the Queen, arrived for a relic tour including Śrī Pada, Anurādhapura, and the Tooth Relic at Kandy (12 February, 16 February and 18 March 1892 issues of the newspaper *Sarasavi Sandarāsa*). Near century's end, in December 1898, another royal embassy, including members of the Burmese royal family, arrived to make further offerings to the Tooth Relic. They brought a golden casket for the relic (6 December, 9 December, and 13 December 1898, 10 January, 13 January, 27 January, and 31 January 1899 issues of *Sarasavi Sandarāsa*; Prajñānanda 1947 1:261; 28 January 1899 issue of the newspaper *Lakrivikiraṇa*). One year later, the Burmese court sent a retinue of approximately 200 people to make additional offerings to the Tooth Relic (2 February and 13 February 1900 issues of *Sarasavi Sandarāsa*). A local historian writing from Colombo recalled the political conditions that led to the Burmese offerings:

a large band of Burmese pilgrims, monks and laymen [arrived], the number including the daughters of King Theebaw and many noblemen and wealthy citizens of Rangoon. They brought with them a magnificent golden casket, studded with jewels, for which they had melted down their ornaments, to avert the doom which they believed soon threatened to overtake their country by the presentation of the casket to encase the Tooth Relic of the Buddha at the temple in Kandy. (Wright 1907:81)

Like the Burmese, the Cambodian royal family also intensified their Tooth Relic devotions during this troubled decade. In 1884, a small royal embassy arrived to undertake a relic tour, with offerings destined especially for the relic at Kandy. Although she did not travel to Laṅkā, the Cambodian Queen Mother was the primary donor, sending a richly decorated canopy and curtains, woven and decorated with gold, along with gems and other goods, as relic offerings (in Prajñānanda 1947, 1:366–70).

Then, with their minds bright and clear, and all senses restrained,  
Self-controlled [and] thoroughly robed,  
Then the controlled Cambodian monks  
Gathered in the Relic Chamber with great joy.  
And, then, step by step, the excellencies went about the task.  
Ceremoniously placing that excellent Relic of the Sage,  
Which had been set inside a great golden casket ornamented with beautiful gems,

From that onto a golden lotus,  
 They made it visible in the Relic Chamber.  
 And those monks stood in a line, attentive to it,  
 As if watching for a new moon.  
 Having examined that excellent Relic of the Sage,  
 They were filled with joy...  
 Then, happy, having made offerings to that supreme Relic,  
 Those leading monks, standing,  
 Made wishes properly, with bright clear minds. (in Prajñānānda 1947 I:373–4)

Two years later, according to a Khmer source, King Norodom organized another embassy in concert with his leading monks Pañ and Diañ, sending valuable gifts as Tooth Relic offerings. These included an elephant tusk and a white umbrella decorated with diamonds (Goonatilaka 2003:205–6). The white umbrella, a symbol of kingship, highlighted the Cambodian king's personal investment in donations to the powerful relic.

## Renewals

Sometimes, of course, states and cities fell to rival forces. After a brief period of dislocation, the ruler might return to his royal city. In more desperate days, that city would undergo military occupation, or would lie in ruins while military adventurers took up the reigns of power at another more promising location in the realm. After Ayutthaya fell to the Burmese forces in 1767, the central region of Siam remained unstable for some years. Eventually, in 1782, a new ruler came to power in Bangkok (Wyatt 2003; Reynolds 1979). As the strongmen who became the Chakri dynasty developed regional control, they built for themselves a royal city. Devotees of the Triple Gem, their city took a predictable form, including relic monuments, temples, and the residences and ritual enclosures required for monastic life. The creation of relic monuments and temple structures, and the installation of *bodhi* trees, copied the crucial powerful elements of Indic and Lankan Buddhist landscape onto the new Chakri domain. In addition, however, the Buddhist structures of Bangkok claimed connection to the erstwhile Ayutthayan polity as well, drawing names and architectural features associated with Bangkok's predecessor state into the royally

sponsored buildings of Bangkok. Building materials from the wreckage at Ayutthaya were brought to Bangkok to help build the new royal capital, while the construction of monastic complexes and the new city often followed Ayutthayan models (Wyatt 2003:129; Reynolds 1979:91).

The royal palaces and central monastic complexes of Bangkok were named after celebrated sites at Ayutthaya. These included buildings constructed to house the royal palladia and Buddha-relics at Bangkok. Relics and powerful Buddha images from Ayutthaya and from more distant principalities were installed at the heart of royal power (Worrasit 2007:Chs. 2–3), and their stories recounted in documents eventually edited and compiled for a dynastic chronicle.<sup>18</sup> The Thai chronicle of the First Reign, compiled in the 19th century, noted for instance that

[a] royal *prasat* audience hall was constructed within the palace grounds and was, at the king's personal order, done in the style of the Sanphetprasat Hall at the old capital of Ayutthaya. (Flood, trans. 1978:63)

Another temple restored by [the king] was the Bangwayai Temple, the name of which he changed to the Rakhang after the restoration, in order to make it coincide with the Rakhang Temple at Ayutthaya which had been the temple nearest the old Grand Palace on its western side. (304)

In such ways, Bangkok and its leaders made a phoenix-like claim, rising from the ashes of Ayutthaya, albeit at a distance.

The 18th-century Lankan king Kīrti Śrī Rājasimha of Kandy was fortunate enough to return to his own city after the Dutch invasion, and Kandy then retained its independence until British take-over in 1815. His return to the throne was accompanied by the ritual return of the royal tooth relic to the city, affirming royal authority and the protective power of the relic over his domain.

No longer seeing a hostile force, the Ruler had the whole city cleaned... having had the temple of the Tooth Relic and so on specially decorated.... Having seen

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the changes in the hierarchy of ritual practices at Bangkok, see Worrasit 2007: 114, 146. On Bangkok memories of Ayutthaya, see also Peleggi 2002.



the reliquary, the mind of that faithful King was overcome with wonder. Venerating it properly, bowing his head to the ground, venerating [the relic] with his head, and honoring the company of monks, he drove away the pain [caused by separation from the relic].... Strengthening the Tooth Relic in that former tooth pavilion, he enhanced and instituted all the former offerings. (99:140–1, 144, 149)

At the king's behest, ritual offerings to the relic became increasingly public and dramatic. Offerings of flowers, fruits and sweetmeats were offered to the tooth relic, along with gold and silver and other precious ornaments. Metal smiths were employed to craft a new set of caskets for the relic from gold and gems. The greatly enhanced relic then stood at the heart of elaborate expressions of royal power and merit-making. A leading monastic *literatus*, Tibottuvāvē Buddhārakkhita, writing in praise of his royal patron, evoked the scenes in the style of his day, comparing king Kīrti Śrī Rājasimha to the best of men and gods.

The King, adorned with royal ornaments like the King of the gods, went to the chamber of the Tooth Relic bearing before him a great offering of many elements. Having made the offering of various kinds... he brought out the golden lotus flower together with the Tooth in the lotus of his hand and, taking it, went forth from the temple.... The King, ruler of men, stood like the king of the gods before a divine assembly, in a superb, beautiful pavilion, like a heavenly pavilion, ornamented with all kinds of textiles decorated in various ways. The King showing the excellent tooth of the Lord of Sages, auspicious and available only very rarely through hundreds of thousands of eons, filled the crowds of people with happiness.... (CV 100:27–8, 30, 35–8)

Thus the king of Kandy affirmed his return to the royal city. Public and dramatic expressions of devotion to, and control over, the powerful relic witnessed Kīrti Śrī Rājasimha's military redemption as well as his meritorious right to rule. Annual tooth relic processions provided occasions for the king to make manifest his place at the apex of patron-client relations involving Kandyan Buddhist temples and other shrines, and to publicly assert the incorporation of politically restless high-caste Kandyan families within his sphere of power (Seneviratne 1978; Dewaraja 1988; Blackburn 2001). In addition, through generous offerings to the Buddha's relic, the king also sought insurance against future misadventure, building a stock of protective merit and enhancing the status of his most potent object at the heart of the Kandyan polity.

## Conclusion

The built environment of a polity constructed in a southern Buddhist idiom assumed the centrality of spaces from which contact could be made to the powerful traces of a Buddha. Buddha relics were essential to the vitality and protection of a royal Buddhist city, while rulers buttressed their merit and access to magical potency through pilgrimage offerings to other powerful relics near and far. A history of Buddhist polities and kingship is thus partly a history of the emplotment of potent traces and landscape models onto local territories, and evokes also the movement of the monks, texts, and relics that made possible the constitution of new and powerful local sites of power, and the connection of such sites through pilgrimage, trade, and diplomacy. Buddhist monks, kings, and other members of the royal court could forge and shift the balance of power within a kingdom and its monastic communities in part by participating in “the cult of the relics” (Brown 1981; Schopen 1997). Physical and textual engagement with these potent objects could be used to augment or deplete a person’s reserve of protective transformative power, as well as claims to authority within the royal court or monastic community. As in the histories of Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism, we see that potent protective traces or condensations, whether of the divine and/or of unusually accomplished persons, were central to the creation, protection, and recreation of cities and states.<sup>19</sup> The installation of such potent traces in a new space, and the construction of royal and monastic centers near existing relics or burial sites, drew blessings and magical power into human lives. These acts of installation and construction were also a form of narrative in built form. By evoking connection to highly valued persons and geographies from the near and distant pasts, the built world of devotion and protection wrote lineage through landscape, imbuing new and restored environments with temporal depth and instinctive authority.

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<sup>19</sup>) Beyond the Buddhist world see, for instance, Brown 1981; Duby 1981; Eaton 1978, 2000; Davis 1997; Koch 2001; Ernst 1992.

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## **Gift of the Body in Islam: The Prophet Muhammad's Camel Sacrifice and Distribution of Hair and Nails at his Farewell Pilgrimage**

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### **Abstract**

The following pages examine the relationship between the prophet Muhammad's sacrifice of the camels and the distribution of his hair at the conclusion of his farewell pilgrimage just before his death. A study of the accounts of the Prophet's camel sacrifice shows that it prefigures the annual rites of the Ḥajj using the biblical model of Abraham's sacrifice to align other pre-Islamic practices, including those associated with the cult at Mecca, with the origins of a specifically Islamic civilization. The prophet Muhammad's distribution of his hair, detached from his body at the time of his desacralization from the Ḥajj delineates the Meccan sanctuary as the place of origination from which was spread both the physical and textual corpus of the Prophet's life. Whether by design or not, the traditional Islamic descriptions of this episode from the life of the prophet Muhammad are not unlike narratives found in Buddhist, Iranian, Christian and other traditions in which the body of a primal being is dismembered to create a new social order. Through the gift of the sacrificial camels and parts of his own body, the prophet Muhammad is portrayed, in this episode, as making a figurative and literal offering of himself at the origins of Islamic civilization.

### **Keywords**

pilgrimage, sacrifice, hair, territory, Bible, Mecca

In a description of the farewell pilgrimage of the prophet Muhammad, an event which is said to have taken place in the year of his death, the seventeenth-century Egyptian scholar Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī al-Ḥalabī

(1567–1635) cites a remarkable practice. The account is given on the authority of the well-known ‘Abdallāh Ibn ‘Abbās (619–86).

Ibn ‘Abbās said: The apostle of God led to the sacrifice on his farewell pilgrimage 100 camels [*badanah*], and he immolated thirty of them. Then he ordered ‘Alī to sacrifice the ones that remained. He said: “Distribute the meat, the skin, and the coverings among the people, but the butcher does not get any of it. Take for us from each camel a piece of meat and put it in a single pot, so that we might eat the meat and drink from the broth.” And he did it.

He [apostle of God] related that all of Minā is a place of sacrifice, all the valley of Mecca is a place of sacrifice. Then the apostle of God shaved his head, that is Mu‘amar b. ‘Abdallāh shaved it, and he [apostle of God] said to him: “Here” and he pointed his hand to the right side. So he began with the right side and shaved it, and then the left side. He [apostle of God] distributed his hair. He gave half of it to Abū Ṭalḥah al-Anṣārī — that is, the hair of the left side of his head — and after that said: “Here, Abū Ṭalḥah.” And it is said that he gave it to Umm Sulaym the wife of Abū Ṭalḥah. And it is said, by Abū Kurayb, that he gave the other half of it — that is, the hair of the right side — to the people, one or two hairs at a time. (Ḥalabī n.d.:3:323)

Nūr al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī cites other accounts in which the prophet Muhammad sacrificed sixty-three camels with his own hand, because he was sixty-three years old on that day. He cooked pieces of meat from each camel in a soup, and served the meat and its broth, before ordering ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib to sacrifice the remainder of the 100 camels (Ḥalabī n.d.:3:327–8). Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bustī (d. 965) reports that the prophet Muhammad sacrificed sixty-three camels, gave the rest to ‘Alī to sacrifice, and then he and ‘Alī ate the meat and drank the broth together before riding back to the Ka‘bah and drinking from the water of Zamzam (Bustī 1997:397). In his collection of traditions about the prophet Muhammad, Abū Muḥammad ‘Alī b. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm (994–1064) states that the prophet Muhammad gave something like a third of the 100 camels to ‘Alī to sacrifice (Ibn Ḥazm 1986:206).

These traditions, and others, could indicate that the sharing of the sacrifice with ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib be understood as a sign of the Prophet’s deputizing and designation of ‘Alī as his successor (Bell 1937:233–44; Rubin 1982:241–60). Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī (d. 1374), for example, is specific, using the dual verb forms, that only



the prophet Muhammad and ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib partook of the special meal made from the meat and broth of the many camels sacrificed.

Then he [prophet Muhammad] went to the place of sacrifice and immolated sixty-three camels. He gave to ‘Alī and he sacrificed what remained and thanked him for his leading of the animals. Then he ordered that a piece be taken from each of the camels and put into a pot, and cooked. The two of them ate [*akalā*] the meat and the two of them drank [*sharabā*] the broth. (Dhahabī 1996:2:292)

The close connection between the account of the camel sacrifice and the distribution of the Prophet’s hair, here and in al-Ḥalabī’s text, suggests a larger mythological context surrounding these last acts of the farewell pilgrimage. According to the account attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās, the prophet Muhammad ordered ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib to distribute the meat and other produce of the camel sacrifice to the other people present. The scale of the sacrifice itself is remarkable as is the number of hairs distributed. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (780–855) preserves a report, on the authority of Anas b. Mālīk, that the companions of the prophet Muhammad encircled him so as not to allow a single hair to fall from his head onto the ground (Ibn Ḥanbal 4:42). The same report is repeated in the *al-Fuṣūl fī sirah al-rusūl* of Abū al-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl Ibn Kathīr (d. 1372) along with the report that the hairs from the left side of the Prophet’s head were given out to his companions one or two at a time (Ibn Kathīr 1999:212–9). The distribution of the hairs one or two at a time, mentioned by al-Ḥalabī and reported in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim on the authority of Abū Bakr, seems to indicate that a large number of people were present for this distribution (Muslim 15:56).

In his recension of the biography of the prophet Muhammad, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Mālīk Ibn Hishām (d. 828) follows the report of the farewell pilgrimage with an account of the Prophet sending messengers to the various Arab and non-Arab kings, including the Negus of Ethiopia, Khosraw of Sasanian Iran, and Heraclius of Rome through Muqawqis in Alexandria. He makes an explicit comparison between this event and Jesus’ sending of his disciples throughout the world as is described in the New Testament Acts of the Apostles 2:1–13 (Ibn Hishām n.d.:970–2; Guillaume 1967:652–9). The specification that the Prophet’s sacrifice produced both food and drink for his followers might be understood as a reflection of Jesus’ offering of bread and wine

as his flesh and blood in the Last Supper just before his death. Of course, in Christian theology the Last Supper is thought to prefigure the substitute of Jesus as a sacrifice for the usual animal victim, while the prophet Muhammad's camel sacrifice is supposed to recall Abraham's substitution of an animal for his son. In Buddhism, as well as other religious traditions, the gift of one's body is often tied to and understood as a sacrifice in which a death of the leader creates or renews the established social order.

The following pages examine the relationship between the prophet Muhammad's sacrifice of the camels and the distribution of his hair at the conclusion of his farewell pilgrimage just before his death. A study of the accounts of the Prophet's camel sacrifice shows that it prefigures the annual rites of the Ḥajj using the biblical model of Abraham's sacrifice to align other pre-Islamic practices, including those associated with the cult at Mecca, with the origins of a specifically Islamic civilization. The prophet Muhammad's distribution of his hair, detached from his body at the time of his desacralization from the Ḥajj, delineates the Meccan sanctuary as the place of origination from which was spread both the physical and textual corpus of the Prophet's life. Whether by design or not, the traditional Islamic descriptions of this episode from the life of the prophet Muhammad are not unlike narratives found in Buddhist, Iranian, Christian and other traditions in which the body of a primal being is dismembered to create a new social order. Through the gift of the sacrificial camels and parts of his own body, the prophet Muhammad is portrayed, in this episode, as making a figurative and literal offering of himself as the origins of Islamic civilization.

### **Camel Sacrifice**

The farewell pilgrimage is generally understood by later Muslim scholars as the primary instance by which the prophet Muhammad established the correct performance of the rituals associated with the obligatory Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. Ibn Hishām preserves an account given by 'Abdallāh b. Abī Najih.

'Abdallāh b. Abī Najih told me that when the apostle of God stood at 'Arafah he said: "This is the place of standing, to the mountain around which it sits, all of

‘Arafah is a place of standing.” When he stood at Quṣaḥ on the morning of al-Muzdalifah, he said: “This place of standing and all of al-Muzdalifah is a place of standing.” Then when he sacrificed at the place of sacrifice at Minā he said: “This is the place of sacrifice and all Minā is a place of sacrifice.” The apostle of God completed the Ḥajj and showed them their rituals, he taught them what God made obligatory for them from their Ḥajj: the place of standing, the throwing of the stones, the circumambulation of the temple, what he had allowed for them from their Ḥajj and what he had forbidden for them. It was the pilgrimage of completion and the farewell pilgrimage because the apostle of God did not perform the Ḥajj after that. (Ibn Hishām n.d.:970; Guillaume 1967:652)

In other accounts the prophet Muhammad delivers a sermon [*khutbah*] in which he states that God prohibits usury, abolishes pre-Islamic wergilds, establishes four of twelve months as being sacred, and discusses relations between men and women which might reflect Q 8:27 and 33:72 (Ibn Hishām n.d.:968–9; Guillaume 1967:650–1). ‘Umar b. Muṣ‘ab al-Wahīḥ relates that when the prophet Muhammad cleared the idols from the Ka‘bah he also made a speech in which he abolished pre-Islamic claims to property and wergild (Ibn Hishām n.d.:821; Guillaume 1967:552–3; Ṭabarī 1879–1901:1641). In his exegesis of Q 110, Abū ‘Alī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī (d. 1153) writes that the prophet Muhammad established the rules protecting the animals and trees of the Meccan sanctuary at the time he cleared the idols from the Ka‘bah. Writing about the same time Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Ibn ‘Aṭīyah (d. 1148) cites a tradition attributed to Ibn ‘Umar that Q 110 was revealed at the time of the prophet Muhammad’s farewell pilgrimage at the time he would have performed his sacrifice. Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) states that Q 110 was revealed to the Prophet at Minā.

Some scholars conclude, on the basis of pre-Islamic pilgrimage practices, that the “‘Umrah” and the “Ḥajj” were originally separate practices. Muslim sources describing pre-Islamic practices indicate that the “*hajj*” was centered on ‘Arafāt and places removed from Mecca, and the “*umrah*” was focused on the Ka‘bah in Mecca. Annual markets, and fairs associated with the date harvest, in the month of Dhū al-Qa‘dah in Ukāẓ and Majannah, and the month of Dhū al-Ḥijjah in Dhū al-Majāz, seem to have preceded a ritual visit to ‘Arafāt (Afghānī 1937, *passim*). The Christian heresiographer Epiphanius (d. 403) mentions a “Aggathalbaeith” which could be a reference to a “*hajjat al-bayt*” as a pilgrimage or other rituals associated with a “temple” [*bayt*]

or other sanctuary in the northern Ḥijāz or in Syria. According to Snouck Hurgronje, the prophet Muhammad's statement, in his farewell pilgrimage, regarding the practice of "standing" [*wuqūf*] at 'Arafāt and the sacrifice at Minā was intended to replace discrete pre-Islamic practices with a unified series of rituals centered on the Ka'bah in Mecca (Snouck Hurgronje 1880:esp. 68–124; Wensinck 1954–2008: 3:31–3; Houtsma 1904:185–7).

Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), in his commentary on Q 2:158, claims that it was Abraham who first instituted the rituals of the Ḥajj that included the circumambulation of the Ka'bah and the running between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah. In his exegesis of Q 2:158, however, Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) preserves a report given on the authority of the Kufan 'Āmir b. Sharāḥīl b. 'Abd al-Sha'bī that associates al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah with pre-Islamic pagan practices:

The idol at al-Ṣafā was called Isāf and the idol at al-Marwah was called Nā'ilah. In pre-Islamic times the people used to circumambulate the temple [*al-bayt*] and run between the two locations, rubbing the two idols.

In another report, given on the authority of Qatādah, it is stated that in pre-Islamic times the people of the Tihāmah used to run circuits between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah, and Mujāhid reports that the running between the two rocks at al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah was a practice of people in the pre-Islamic period (Suyūṭī 2000 on Q 2:158). Hishām b. al-Kalbī (d. 819) reports that the idols Isāf and Nā'ilah were the location of sacrifices in pre-Islamic times, although some reports place the idols in Mecca or at the bottom of al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah (Fahd 1968:passim; Fahd 1954–2008:4:91–2). The early legal debates over the necessity of including the running between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah, and the sacrifice, may be evidence of the process by which the various pre-Islamic elements were subsumed into the obligatory Islamic pilgrimage (Hawting 2004:4:91–99; Batanūnī 1911:passim; Firestone 1990:esp. 63–71).

The variable status of the sacrifice to be performed as part of the Islamic pilgrimage, as defined by Muslim jurists, might also reflect some aspects of how different historical practices were included in the

example of the prophet Muhammad's farewell pilgrimage. According to Abū al-Walid Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), Muslim jurists agree that a sacrifice is required for the concurrent performance of the 'Umrah and Ḥajj [*tamattu'*] and some jurists maintain that a sacrifice is required for conjoining the performance of the 'Umrah and Ḥajj [*qirān*] (Ibn Rushd 1996:3:396). The sacrifice is not required for a separate performance of the 'Umrah or Ḥajj, although a number of "crimes" or ritual mistakes, when done by the pilgrim, make the sacrifice mandatory as an expiation. These crimes requiring a redemptive blood sacrifice [*fidyah dam*] include killing wild animals, sexual relations, and the premature cutting of the hair and nails. The person making the sacrifice must distribute its meat to the poor people who live in the Meccan sanctuary or who are residing there as pilgrims, but according to some jurists only the meat of the sacrifices offered for the concurrent [*tamattu'*] and conjoined [*qirān*] pilgrimages may be eaten by the pilgrim making the offering. Yaḥyā b. Abī al-Khayr al-'Umrānī (d. 1163) states that a person performing the concurrent [*tamattu'*] pilgrimages can delay the sacrifice until when he dies ('Umrānī 2002:4:393). On the basis of Q 5:95 some jurists restrict the location of the sacrifice and the distribution of its meat to the Meccan sanctuary (Ibn Rushd 1996:3:402–3). The Ḥanbalī scholar Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh b. Aḥmad Ibn Qudāmah (1147–1223) states that if a person vows to make a sacrifice, and does not specify the location, then he is required to deliver it to the poor people of the Meccan sanctuary based on Q 22:33 (Ibn Qudāmah 1992:5:452–3).

Although in the context of the Islamic pilgrimage the sacrifice appears to be obligatory only to expiate for certain ritual mistakes, a number of the regulations prescribed by the jurists indicate that the pre-Islamic practice of the sacrifice was the central reason for the visit to the Ka'bah. Ibn Qudāmah cites the centrality of the sacrifice as the cause for Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's requirement of distributing the meat inside the sanctuary, even if the sacrifice itself took place elsewhere (Ibn Qudāmah 1992:5:451). In the tenth-century redaction of the *Akḥbār Makkah*, Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Wāqidi (d. 822) is cited as reporting that in pre-Islamic times the people used to perform sacrifices and shave their heads at the site of the idols of Isāf and Nā'ilah (Azraqī n.d.:2:234). It is also reported that people used to shave their

heads at the site of the cult object representing Manāt after performing sacrifices at Minā (Azraqī n.d.:1:73; Ibn Hishām n.d.:55; Guillaume 1967:39). Ibn Qudāmah, based on the practice of the prophet Muhammad, states that sacrifices are to be performed at the same location as the ritual shaving of the head is performed (Ibn Qudāmah 1992:5:450; Bukhārī 3:12–4; Muslim 2:860–1; Abū Dāʿūd 1:430–431; Tirmidhī on Q 2:196; Ibn Ḥanbal 4:240–4; ʿUmrānī 2002:4:392). According to Ibn Hishām, the grandfather of the prophet Muhammad made a sacrifice at the idols of Isāf and Nāʿilah where the Meccans performed their sacrifices (Ibn Hishām n.d.:97–100; Guillaume 1967:66–68). Ibn Saʿd reports that sacrifices were offered to the “Rabb” of the sanctuary at Mecca, a title that is found in Q 106:3 [*rabb hādha al-bayt*] and attributed to other deities such as al-Lāt at al-Ṭāʾif (Ibn Saʿd 1:92; Chelhod 1954–2008:3:53–54; Wensinck and Fahd 1954–2008:8:330; Watt 1979:205–11; Hawting 1999:esp. 20–44). The *Akhhbār Makkah* preserves a report that there were seven idols [*aṣṇām*] set up in Minā by ʿAmr b. Laḥī, the location where the prophet Muhammad later made his camel sacrifice (Azraqī n.d.:2:176).

In part, these practices are based on accounts of the prophet Muhammad’s sacrifice of camels at al-Ḥudaybiyah when he and his followers were stopped from entering the Meccan sanctuary. Muslim scholars link this incident to the revelation of Q 2:196 and 48:25, suggesting that the sacrifice itself was more important than the actual visitation of the Kaʿbah.

Q 48:25. They are the ones who disbelieve and kept you from the *al-masjid al-ḥarām*, and the sacrificial animals were detained from reaching the place of sacrifice...

According to al-Suyūṭī this verse refers to a time when the Prophet and a large group of his followers came to Dhū al-Ḥulayfah on the outskirts of Medina where they marked [*qalada*, *shaʿara*] a sacrificial animal [*hadī*] and sanctified it for the ʿUmrah [*aḥrama bi-ʿumrah*] (Suyūṭī 2000 on Q 48:25). Although these are the standard terms found in Islamic legal descriptions of the pilgrimage sacrifice, the marking of the camel with a sandal around its neck [*qalada*] and the marking of

its body by piercing its hump [*sha'ara*] were the terms used for preparing the sacrifice, specifically a camel, to be sent to the Ka'bah in pre-Islamic times. That the animals were sanctified for the 'Umrah while still on the outskirts of Medina may be related to the sacrifice as the primary purpose of the pre-Islamic 'Umrah. There is no specific information that the prophet Muhammad and his followers sent sacrifices to the Ka'bah before the conquest of Mecca but the locations of the sacrifice were the same for the pagan Meccans. According to Ibn Hishām, the Prophet brought seventy camels, one for every ten of his followers with him (Ibn Hishām n.d.:740; Guillaume 1967:499–500). Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1149) explains that the Prophet's sacrifice of camels at al-Ḥudaybiyah, rather than in the sanctuary at Mecca, was an exception made by the revelation of Q 48:25. The Meccans did not allow the animals to be brought to the Ka'bah although Q 2:158 evinced that such a practice seems to have been established.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the Prophet and his followers shaved their heads following the sacrifice at al-Ḥudaybiyah, despite the fact that they did not enter the precincts of the sanctuary and circumambulate the Ka'bah, illustrates the connection between the sacrifice and the removal of hair.

In both pre-Islamic and Islamic times, it is clear that the camel was the preferred sacrificial victim for the Meccan sanctuary. Following the example set by the prophet Muhammad at Dhū al-Ḥulayfah, Islamic law recommends that the animal be marked by the piercing of its left or right side [*ish'ār*], a practice that originates in the piercing of the camel's hump (Ibn Rushd 1996:3:398). Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Yazīd Ibn Mājah (d. 899) cites a report in which Ibn 'Abbās describes the prophet Muhammad piercing the sacrificial animal on the right side of its hump, causing blood to be drawn (Ibn Mājah 25:96). In his commentary on the *Muwatta'* of Mālik b. Anas, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Bāqī b. Yūsuf al-Zurqānī (d. 1710) explains that according to Mālik the left side of the camel's hump is to be pierced although al-Shāfi'i

<sup>1</sup>) According to Yāqūt, the location of the sacrifice at al-Ḥudaybiyah is only part within the boundaries of the sanctuary but is not within the circuit of the pilgrimage. The distance between al-Ḥudaybiyah and the Ka'bah is more than a day leading camels.

and Abū Ḥanīfah hold that the right side is to be pierced (Zurqānī 1990:2:433–4). The use of other domesticated animals as a substitute for camels appears to be related to the exegesis of Q 5:95 where the animal to be sacrificed in expiation for killing a wild animal in the Meccan sanctuary is said to be taken from domesticated herd animals [*naʿam*] (Dussaud 1921:esp. 134–75). Jurists have to rely on practice of the followers of the prophet Muhammad to establish the type of domesticated animal that is to be sacrificed for each type of wild animals, which had the result of increasing differentiations based on the appearance and market value of the animals.

ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb ruled that [the sacrificial animal for] a hyena [ḍabʿ] is a ram [kabsh], for a ghazelle is a goat [ʿanz], for a rabbit [arnab] is a she-goat [ʿanāq], for a jerboa is a lamb that is just weaned [jafrah]. (Ibn Rushd 1996:3:361–77)

In all cases, camels are assigned a value higher than that of the other herd animals, and certain ritual violations, such as circumambulating the Kaʿbah while menstruating or having sex during the pilgrimage, can only be expiated with the sacrifice of a camel (Ibn Rushd 1996:3:373–95).

Islamic sources refer to specific cult officials in charge of sacrifices performed at Mecca and at other cult sites in Arabia, many of whom are said to be related to the prophet Muhammad or his followers (Abū Dāʿūd 1:195; Ibn al-Athīr n.d.:5:17, 1.4; Halдар 1945:162–3). Ibn Hishām relates that the Banū Muʿattib were responsible for the offices of the *ḥijābah* and *sadānah* of al-Lāt in al-Ṭāʾif, and Abū al-Faraj ʿAlī b. Ḥusayn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 967) mentions special female officials holding the office of *sadanah* at ʿUkāz (Ibn Hishām n.d.:55; Guillaume 1967:38; Azraqī n.d.:1:125–129; Iṣfahānī 1285:79; Lammens 1928:101; Halдар 1945:107). The offices of *sadānah* and *ḥijābah* are said to have been established by ʿAmr b. Luḥayy, the first king of the Khuzāʿa, who established the pagan cult in Mecca, were inherited by Quṣayy after uniting the tribes of the Quraysh, and passed down to his four sons including ʿAbd Manāf the great, great grandfather of the prophet Muhammad (Ibn al-Kalbī 1969:8; Ibn Hishām n.d.:50). The key to the Kaʿbah was given to Quṣayy by Ḥulayl whose daughter Ḥubbā, according to al-Ṭabarī, was one of the female *sādinah* of Mecca (Ṭabarī



1879–1901:1094). These offices were responsible for maintaining the cult objects and providing for the pilgrims arriving to make sacrifices at the location. The cult objects representing the deities Hubal and Manāf are reported to have been set up near the Ka'bah, and the idols Isāf and Nā'ilah were the site of sacrifices (Wāqidi 1966:2:832; Yāqūt 1979:4:185; Fahd 1968:39; Azraqī n.d.:75; Ibn al-Kalbī 1969:29; Rubin 1986:106). There is evidence that these officials were in charge of special tents that housed cult implements such as the “tabernacle” of al-Lāt under the custodianship of Mas'ūd b. Mu'attib and his wife Subai'a bt. 'Abd Shams (Lammens 1928:103–7; Halдар 1945:165).

In addition to the *ḥijābah* and *sadānah*, other offices were assigned to cult officials in Mecca tied directly to practices associated with priestly classes at other Near Eastern cult centers. Ibn al-Kalbī mentions the *ṣāhib al-qidāḥ* who is in charge of divination by the casting of arrows for the cult of Hubal in Mecca, and Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869) refers to a number of figures including the *'arrāf*, *ḥāzī*, *matbū'*, and the *kāhin*, all of whom are attached to the cult at Mecca (Ibn al-Kalbī 1969:8; Jāḥiẓ 1955:140; Fahd 1966:430; Halдар 1945:171–3). Both the *kāhin* and the *afkāl*, terms which are attributed to cult officials in Mecca and appear to be interchangeable at times, are reported to have performed the cultic functions linked with officials of the same titles in other parts of the Arabian peninsula and Syria, focused on maintaining the sanctuary and performing sacrifices. Other epigraphic evidence attests to sacrifices in the sanctuaries of Manāt al-Lāt (Lammens 1928:108; Fahd 1954–2008:4:421; Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995:1:95–96; Qudrah 1993:72; Theeb 2000:33–4) and al-'Uzzā (Derenbourg 1905:passim; Henninger 1975:196). Frank Moore Cross and others have highlighted the close connections between the cultic practices of ancient Israel and the evidence of practices from pre-Islamic Arabia (Cross 1973:passim; Margoliouth 1937:passim; Halдар 1945:161–98; Halpern 1992:4:17–22). A Nabataean inscription refers to the *kāhin* of Lat and Allat [*khn 'ltw 'lhr'*], and North Arabic inscriptions attest to the role of the *afkal* and *kāhin* as consecrating cult objects and performing sacrifices (Savignac 1932:591–3, no. 2; Jaussen and Savignac 1914:49, 64; Winnett 1937:17). The relationship between divination and sacrifice in the pre-Islamic cult is described by Ibn Qutaybah (Beeston 1949:207–28;

Muss-Arnolt 1899–1900:193–224; Cryer 1994, *passim*; Robertson Smith 1885:113–28), and Yāqūt mentions the link between a sacrifice to al-Jalsad and the receipt of the oracle (Yāqūt 1979:2:100; Wellhausen 1897:53).

Pilgrimages and the establishment of cult objects for the purpose of offering sacrifices are attested in other locations throughout the Arabian peninsula. Safaitic inscriptions from the basalt desert refer to sacrifices [ṣḥḥ] to different deities including Ba'al-Shamin, Lāt, Ilāt, and Ruḏā, some of them offered on behalf of relatives or tribes (Ryckmans 1950–1:431–3; *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* 875, 852, 3946, 4359, 1658; Littman 1940:649). One Safaitic inscription specifies that the sacrifice consisted of “two camels for Ilāt and Ruḏā” [ḥgm̄ln qyn llt w rḏw] (*Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* 1658; Dussaud and Macler 1901:388). The Greek historian Herodotus (3.8–9) describes an oath between Arabs involving the smearing of blood on seven stones while invoking the names of deities, and the *Shifā' al-ghirām* of Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Makkī (d. 1429) states that the sanctuary in Mecca was marked off by a series of standing stones [anṣāb] erected on all sides except for the direction of Ḥaddah, Juddah, and al-Jī'rānah (Makkī 2000:1:72). Places of sacrifice were often stationed at the outskirts of the sanctuary proper, as attested at Hatra and Palmyra (Van Buren 1952:76–92). In the Negev and Sinai standing stones arranged in lines and clusters were commonly used to demarcate special areas near settlements of the 4th and 3rd millennia BCE, and earlier examples can be found at Catal Hüyük in Anatolia (Avner 1984:115–31; Worschech 2000:193–200). Yāqūt mentions the erection of markers [akhlīyah] to show the boundaries of a sanctuary [ḥimā] in the Arabian peninsula (Yāqūt 1979:3:790; Wellhausen 1897:102; Robertson Smith 1894:140–63). A long South Arabic inscription at Itwat describes a series of rules to be followed by those visiting the sanctuary to take part in the sacrifice of first fruits and animals (Ghul 1984:33–9).

The relationship between the cult site where sacrifices are to be performed and the visitation of the dead is widespread. In the Sinai and elsewhere cairns and tombs in rock shelters are adjacent to special areas marked off with standing stones (Sartre 1983:83–99; Avner 1984:97–122; Yosef 1983:52–60; Zarins 1984:9–42, esp. 31; Gilmore,

al-Ibrahim and Murad 1982:9–24). According to Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, the tomb of ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl was regarded as a sanctuary marked by the erection of standing stones [*anṣāb*] in a one-mile circumference (Iṣfahānī 1285:15:139; Wellhausen 1897:163; Goldziher 1884:332–59). Ibn Hishām reports that the Daws tribe had a special *ḥimā* dedicated to Dhū al-Sharā, and there are reports in the early Islamic period of people setting up tents and seeking refuge at grave sites (Ibn Hishām n.d.:276; Guillaume 1967:253; Krehl 1863:83; Goldziher 1884:334). Cult centers at al-Dur, Hatra, Petra, and Madā'in Ṣāliḥ appear to have been tied to funerary rites, and the rituals performed when visiting the sites closely parallel death and mourning rituals (Lecomte 1993:195–217; Safar and Mustafa 1974:passim). The most obvious example is the circumambulation of the tomb, both by the corpse prepared for burial and by people coming to visit the deceased at the tomb (Robertson Smith 1895:392; Haldar 1945:183–5; Ibn Jubayr 1907:194–95). Of the plants growing in the pre-Islamic Arabian sanctuaries, only those used for the purification of temples or the building of tombs were allowed to be cut (Wellhausen 1897:102; Robertson Smith 1894:142–43n1). Many of the terms used for “tomb” may also be used to refer to cult objects, sanctuaries, and temples. The prophet Muhammad is reported to have turned the tomb of one of his followers into a mosque, and a number of mosques are built on the site of tombs of prophets or famous Muslims (Ibn al-Athīr n.d.:5:150).

That Mecca itself was considered to be a graveyard, at least in early Islamic and perhaps pre-Islamic times, is attested by the traditions regarding burials there and the rituals performed as part of the cult. There are reports that corpses were carried around the Ka'bah, and there exist several different traditions concerning the various prophets and others buried around the Ka'bah in the Meccan sanctuary (Lammens 1928:203; Muqatil b. Sulayman 1979 on Q 2:125; Azraqī n.d.:39; Fāsī 1:197; Ḥalabī n.d.:14; Ibn Qutaybah 1924:14; Ibn Sa'd 1:52; Suyūṭī 2000 on Q 2:125; Rubin 1986:110–1). According to Muqātil b. Sulaymān there are seventy prophets, including Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Ishmael buried near the Ka'bah in Mecca, and al-Ḥalabī mentions 300 prophets buried in the Meccan sanctuary. There exist a number of Ka'bah-like structures in both Petra and Madā'in Ṣāliḥ, both of which,

like other sites in the Arabian peninsula such as ‘Ain Jawān, Thāj, al-Kharj, and Aflāq, were known as necropolises. The archaeological record appears to show that all the major late antique cult centers of the peninsula and the deserts of Iraq and Syria were tied to funerary rites. Ibn al-Kalbī and others mention that people visited Ka’bah’s at other locations in the Ḥijāz and elsewhere within the Arabian peninsula. Arent Jan Wensinck details a number of practices that evince clear comparisons between rites of mourning and rituals specific to the pre-Islamic and Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca including prostrations and standings, circumambulation of tombs, special clothing, and neglect of appearance (Wensinck 1917). Perhaps the most common ritual performed as a part of funerary rites, both in Arabia and elsewhere in the ancient world, was sacrifice.

Specifically connecting the sacrifice of camels with the location and visitation of tombs are reports of the pre-Islamic practice of killing mounts and other domesticated animals for the deceased. The “*baliyah*” is said to have been a camel, or horse, tied to the grave of its master or hamstrung and allowed to starve to death. It is reported that, in some cases, the animals were burnt or were sacrificed and stuffed with a special grass [*thumām*] (Shahrastānī 2:439; Wellhausen 1897:180; Lammens 1928:176, 341; Chelhod 1955:117). In some cases it appears that the slaughtered animal provided the meal for the funeral feast [*wadīmah*]. Richard Burton observed cairns and rock-pile tombs on which were inscribed the camel brands [*wusūm*] of the tribe (Burton 1879:321). According to Jawād ‘Alī, some Muslims believe that the sacrifice of a riding animal at the time of their death will provide them with a mount on which to ride on the Day of Resurrection, and al-Ghazālī reports that some people believe God creates a special camel for them, after resurrection, out of the good works they did while alive (Smith and Haddad 2002:232–33; Wellhausen 1897:180). It is also reported that visitors to the tomb perform camel sacrifices as a tribute to those interred at the cult site, or as a substitute for the lack of an original sacrifice at the time of death. According to al-Jāhiz, 300 camels were sacrificed at the grave of a martyr, and the son of Ja’far b. ‘Ulba is said to have sacrificed all the available young camels and sheep (Yāqūt 1979:349; Goldziher 1884:340–42). Abū ‘Ubaydah is reported to have sacrificed a camel near the *anṣāb* of Tawbah b. Ḥumayyir when

visiting his tomb, and Majnūn al-ʿĀmirī sacrificed a camel at the grave of his father (Isfahānī 1285:1:168; Goldziher 1884:340–42).

That such practices pre-dated these reports in Islamic sources is demonstrated by archaeological evidence primarily from the Arabian peninsula (Corbett 2009, *passim*; Vogt 1984:279–90). A burial inscription from Wādī Ram in southern Jordan, found nearby to a cairn-type tomb, refers to a camel sacrifice.

This is the [grave] tumulus and the [camel] burial  
which ʿtmw [son of] ʿh[n]t has build for ʿh[n]t [his] father. (Hayajneh 2006:104–5)

This Nabataean inscription is dated to the first-century CE, and may be related to other burials near the Nabataean necropolis at Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, the tumuli graves near Taymāʾ or the rock-pile graves in Wādī Tirba. A text from Wādī Ghabr in the Ḥaḍramawt, marks the tomb of a person in which a camel was also buried (Frantsouzoff 2003:251–65). At Mleiha, located in the modern emirate of Sharjah at the foot of the Hajar mountains, is a burial complex dating sometime from the first centuries CE, consisting of twenty-six tombs, twelve of which contain the skeletons of camels and horses. The camels are buried in a sacrificial position, seated with their heads pulled back, and appear to have been slaughtered before being buried (Jasim 1999:69–101; Mouton 1999: *passim*). Other camel burials have been excavated in al-Dur, Jabal al-Buhais, Jabal Emalah, Hafit, Baat, Beles, and Raybun (Boucharlat and others 1989:5–72; Sedov 1988:61–66; Ibrahim 1982: *passim*; Frifelt 1985:89–105; Zarins 1984:25–55; Bibby 1954:116–141). The articulated animal skeletons at these locations also indicate that the animals were made to kneel in their graves and then slaughtered before being buried. That only the single horse found at Mleiha was buried with a full harness made of ornamented gold might suggest that its slaughter had special significance, perhaps related to the belief, attested in literary sources, of providing its master with a mount in the afterlife (Uerpmann 1999:102–18; Mashkour 1997:725–36). There is little to indicate the purpose of the camel burials but it is possible that such burials were related to the function of sacrifice, whether expiatory, as tribute or otherwise, in the more urban settings of religious fairs and

market cities in the Hijāz and the capital cities of southern Arabia (Hayajneh 2006:112–113; Robin 1978:103–28).

### Distribution of Hair

In his commentary on the ḥadīth collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥākim (d. 1345) remarks on several reports regarding the distribution of hair at the conclusion of the prophet Muhammad’s farewell pilgrimage.

Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. Zayd reported that his father witnessed the Prophet at the place of sacrifice, he and a man from the Anṣār. The apostle of God shaved his head into his cloth and gave it, apportioning it to the men. And he cut his nails and gave them to his companion.

They [the people transmitting this report] said: It [viz., the hair] is with us now dyed with henna and *katam*. (Ḥākim 1990:1:647, no. 136/1744)

He also cites another report given on the authority of Anas b. Mālīk that identifies the companion of the Prophet as being Abū Ṭalḥah and explains that the hair was shaved one side at a time, but the report does not mention the nails being cut and distributed (Ḥākim 1990:1:646, no. 135/1743). Other reports and the comments on them appear to deflect attention from the unusual act of the Prophet distributing his hair and nails by focusing on the details of the different accounts. In his commentary on the reports in Muslim’s collection, Yaḥyā’ b. Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 1279) does mention that it is allowed for people to consider the hairs of the Prophet as a blessing [*barakah*] but also states that the report establishes the preferred practice of pilgrims starting with the right side when shaving their heads at the conclusion of the pilgrimage rituals (Nawawī 2000:2:45 on Muslim 15:56). Along with al-Nawawī, Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Qaṣṭallānī (d. 1517) comments on the disagreement over the name of the barber (Qaṣṭallānī 4:33). In his commentary on the reports in the collection of al-Bukhārī, Aḥmad b. ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 1449) discusses the disagreement regarding the hair of which side of the Prophet’s head was given to Abū Ṭalḥah, his wife Umm Sulaym and the other followers present at the time of the farewell pilgrimage (Ibn Ḥajar 1988:11:59–60 on Bukhārī 56:761).

Muslim jurists explain that the cutting of hair and nails after the sacrifice is intended to mark the pilgrim's transition from a sacralized to non-sacralized state. That the shaving of the head and paring of the nails is specifically tied to the sacrifice is evident in the obligation to send a sacrifice to Mecca before desacralization when constrained from visiting the Ka'bah, and in the strict prohibition against shaving before performing the sacrifice (Muslim 15:113, 130, 141–143, 147, 175–179; Ibn Mājah 20:36; Bukhārī 25:32, 34, 107, 109, 126; 47:15; 64:77; 94:3; Abū Dā'ūd 11:24; Nasā'ī 24:45, 48, 76, 186). Abū Bakr 'Abd al-Razzāq cites reports in which it is stated that in Baṣrah and Kūfah people practiced a “standing” [*ta'rīf*] parallel with the “standing” [*wuqūf*] at 'Arafah at the time of the Ḥajj ('Abd al-Razzāq 1983: 4:376–78; Hawting 2006:58–73, esp. 62n14). According to al-Wāqidi, the prophet Muhammad refrained from cutting his nails or shaving his head until he performed his sacrifice [*ḍaḥīyah*] in Medina on the day the sacrifice was taking place in Minā (Wāqidi 1966:1088; Hawting 2006:60). Among Arabs and other Semites in different areas hair was shaved or cut at particular cult centers and offered to the local deity. Yāqūt cites Ibn Hishām's description of the pilgrimage [*ḥajj*] to al-Uqayṣir where the pilgrims would shave their heads and mix the hair into bread offerings that they would then eat (Yāqūt, s.v.; Robertson Smith 1894:223–224; Wellhausen 1897:58; Henninger 1981:301). Hair is reported to have been offered to Atargatis in Hieropolis, as part of the prostitution cult in Mylitta, and to patron deities in Rome (Henninger 1981:300). Hair is also used in divination rites (Fleming 1992:passim; Leach 1959:147–64; Fahd 1966:255n2). In some cases, the offering of hair is seen as a rite of passage, such as the cutting of girls' hair before marriage, or at the conclusion of fulfilling a vow, as in the case of the biblical Nazirite (Herodotus 4:34; Pausanias 1:43; Chepey 2005:passim). According to Ibn Ḥanbal, it is recommended that converts to Islam shave their heads, and the Khawārij are reported to have shaved their heads to distinguish themselves from other Muslims.<sup>2</sup> In pre-Islamic times, the people of al-Ṭā'if are said to have

<sup>2</sup> See the references in Ibn Ḥanbal 3:415 and 3:244. Also see the overview in Hallpike 3738–3741. There are a number of reports that Muslims should dye their hair to distinguish themselves from Jews and Christians. See Bukhārī 60:50, 77:63; Muslim 37:80; Abū Dā'ūd 32:18; Tirmidhī 22:10; Nasā'ī 48:14; Ibn Mājah 32:32.

shaved their heads at the local cult center after returning from a journey, and Diodorus (1:18) mentions that Egyptian travelers did not cut their hair until they completed their journeys (Wāqidi 1966:381; Robertson Smith 1894:331; Sikes and Gray 1913:6:474–77).

The ritual cutting of hair and nails is tied, in particular, to funerary rites and mourning for the dead. After the death of Khālīd b. al-Walīd, the women of the Banū Mughīrah are reported to have shaved their heads and put the hair on his tomb (Iṣfahānī 1285:5:12; Goldziher 1886:49–52; Goldziher 1884:332–59). ‘Abd al-Mālīk is said to have cut his and his children’s hair when he heard about the death of ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr (Balādhurī 74; Goldziher 1884:348). Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Ibn Durayd (d. 933) reports that the Khawārij shaved their heads at the grave of their leader Ṣāliḥ b. al-Musarriḥ, and ethnographic reports from Jordan document the practice among Bedouin women (Merrill 1881:511; Granqvist 1965:106–107, 256; Ebers 1872:204; Palmer 1892:483; Goldziher 1884:348–50). The removal of hair for the dead is attested in the Bible (e.g., Jeremiah 7:29, Ezra 9:3, Micah 1:16), and the association of hair offerings with visitation of the dead appears to have been widespread in the ancient world (Olyan 1998:611–22; Schmidt 1996:passim). Herodotus (9:24) mentions that the Persians shaved their heads and cut the hair of their horses after the death of Masistius, and Orestes is said to have offered hair at the tomb of his father (Henninger 1981:476). Deuteronomy 21:12–13 specifies that captive women to be taken as wives by the Israelites are to have their heads shaved and nails cut while mourning for her parents for a month before marriage (Olyan 1998:617). Numbers 6:9–12 stipulates that the Nazirite is to shave his head after coming into contact with a corpse, and some modern scholars speculate that the Islamic rite of shaving at the conclusion of the Ḥajj originates from a funerary ritual (Knohl 1995:passim; Roberts 1996:1005; Botterweck 1974:3.5–20; Fishbane 1950–88:8:326–334; Feldman 1977:79–89; Goldziher 1884:348–50). In pre-Islamic Syria, both men and women are reported to have practiced the cutting of their hair and placing it in caskets inside temples, and pilgrims to the festivals at Byblus and Bamyce deposited their cut hair for sacrifice at the altars there (Lucian 1913:60, 6; Robertson Smith 1894:323–25, 331; Krehl 1863:33; Goldziher 1886:1:248).



From a number of different reports and traditions, it is evident that the hair and nails of the prophet Muhammad, presumably originating from the shaving of his farewell pilgrimage, were distributed and preserved by his followers. In part, this might be related to the many reports of the miracles performed by the Prophet, especially those associated with the unusual nature of his body (Mez 1905:235–38). Ibn Kathīr preserves a report in which Anas b. Mālīk comments on the skin of the prophet Muhammad.

Anas b. Mālīk said: I have never touched silk brocade or silk finer than the hand of the apostle of God. I have never smelled anything more pleasant than the odor of the apostle of God. (Ibn Kathīr 1999:263–64)

Other reports are preserved in the *Dalā'il al-nubūwah* of Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 1066), a work that details descriptions of the Prophet's special body including his head, his hair, and his odor (Bayhaqī 1985:1:216–58).

Yā'la b. 'Aṭā' said: I heard Jābir b. Yazīd b. al-Aswād report that his father said: I came to the apostle of God while he was at Minā and I said to him: Apostle of God, give me your hand. It was whiter than snow and more pleasant smelling than musk. (Ibn Kathīr 1999:263–64)

The water used by the prophet Muhammad to wash his hands was used by his followers as medicine, he used his spit to heal a person, and the Sufi master 'Ad al-Qādir Jilānī had a vision in which the prophet Muhammad put spit on his tongue allowing him to preach (Schimmel 1985:76; Andrae 1918:48; Braune 1933:14). Numerous reports demonstrate that the hairs of the prophet were kept by his followers and passed down to later generations, and 'Abd al-Ghanī b. Ismā'il al-Nābulī (d. 1731) reports a claim that, in India, the hairs of the Prophet grow and increase on their own (Nābulī 1990:344; Goldziher 1886:329–31; Schimmel 1985:43; Ibn Sa'd 1:139–140).

Many of the reports regarding the special nature of the prophet Muhammad's body are directly linked to his performance of sacrifices. The comment, by the father of Jābir b. Yazīd b. al-Aswād, concerning the Prophet's white pleasant-smelling hand, was made when he was

at Minā, where the sacrifices were performed at the cult center of pre-Islamic Mecca. There are reports that, at the time of the Prophet's special sacrifice at al-Ḥudaybiyah, his body produced water for his followers.

Jābir b. 'Abdallāh said that on the day of al-Ḥudaybiyah the people were thirsty and the apostle of God had a water vessel from which he performed the ablution. The people came to him and said they had no water to perform ablution or drink except what was in that vessel. So the Prophet put his hand into the vessel and water poured from between his fingers like springs. Jābir said they drank and performed ablutions, and when he was asked how many people there were he replied that if they had been a hundred thousand the water would have been sufficient for them, adding that there were fifteen hundred.

al-Bara' b. 'Azib said: On the day of al-Ḥudaybiyah we were with the apostle of God, about fourteen hundred of us. At al-Ḥudaybiyah was a well which we used up not leaving a drop in it. When the Prophet heard this he came to it and sat down beside it. He called for a vessel of water and performed his ablutions, rinsed his mouth, and made supplication. Then he poured the water into the well and told them to leave it for awhile. Later, they drew water sufficient for themselves and their animals until the time when they left. (Bukhārī 54:15; 64:35; Ibn Sa'd 1:144; Qazi 1979:16–17)

Ibn Sa'd preserves a report in which the hair cut from the prophet Muhammad and his followers after their sacrifice at al-Ḥudaybiyah was blown by a special wind to the sanctuary at Mecca (Ibn Sa'd 1:75). In these and other reports, the special abilities of the Prophet's body allow his followers to complete their ritual obligations.

There are numerous reports that the Prophet's sweat was collected and preserved by his followers after his death (Thurkill 2007:133–144). It is remarkable that all of these reports seem to be focused on Umm Sulaym, the wife of Abū Ṭalḥah, who received a portion of the prophet Muhammad's hair at the farewell pilgrimage.

Anas b. Mālik: The Prophet came to us and talked to us, and he used to sweat. My mother [Umm Sulaym] brought a long-necked bottle [*qārūrah*] and put in it the sweat. The Prophet woke up and said: "Umm Sulaym what is this you are doing?" She said: "This is sweat we keep it for our perfume." It was the best of perfume. (Muslim 43:22)

Anas b. Mālik related, on the authority of Umm Sulaym, that the Prophet used to come and take a nap with her. She would spread out a leather mat and he

would nap on it. There was a lot of sweat, so she used to collect his sweat and use it as perfume and *qawārīr*. The Prophet said: “Umm Sulaym, what is this?” She said: “Your sweat. I mix it with my perfume.” (Muslim 43:22)

Ibn Ḥajar mentions reports in which she mixes the Prophet’s hair with his sweat, and claims that these reports confuse the role of Umm Sulaym in the distribution of the hair at the time of the farewell pilgrimage with her collection of the Prophet’s sweat (Ibn Ḥajar 1988:11:59–60; Bukhārī 56:761). He also mentions another report in which the Prophet took a nap and sweated not on a leather mat but in the bed of Umm Sulaym (Ibn Ḥajar 1988:11:59–60; Bukhārī 56:761). Ibn Sa’d cites a report, given on the authority of al-Barā’ b. Zayd from Anas b. Mālīk, in which Umm Sulaym wipes the spit or “backwash” [su’r] of the prophet Muhammad onto her body.

These reports evince that Umm Sulaym had an unusual relationship with the prophet Muhammad, especially with his physical body. In addition to being the recipient of the Prophet’s hair, collecting his sweat and wiping his spit on her body, Umm Sulaym is reported to have participated with the Prophet in the special production of food for his followers. Both al-Bukhārī and Muslim preserve reports in which Umm Sulaym and the prophet Muhammad produce food for eighty people from a single loaf of bread (Bukhārī 70:5; Muslim 23:15; Qazī 1979:21). According to al-Ṭabarī, the Prophet lodged with Umm Sulaym two women who had been sent to him by the Christian Patriarch of Alexandria.

In this year [year 7] Ḥaṭīb b. Abī Balta’ah came back from al-Muqawqīs bringing Māriyah and her sister Sīrīn, his female mule Duldul, his donkey Ya’fūr, and sets of garments. With the two women al-Muqawqīs had sent a eunuch, and the latter stayed with them. Ḥaṭīb had invited them to become Muslims before he arrived with them, and Māriyah and her sister did so. The messenger of God lodged them with Umm Sulaym bt. Miḥān. Māriyah was beautiful. The prophet sent her sister Sīrīn to Ḥassān b. Thābit, and she bore him ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥassān. (Ṭabarī 1879–1901:1591; Fishbane 1950–88:131)

It was Umm Sulaym who dedicated her son Anas b. Mālīk, when he was ten years old, to be the servant of the prophet Muhammad. Anas b. Mālīk was the son of Umm Sulaym’s first husband, Mālīk b. al-Naḍr, who left her when she made an oath to follow and fight beside the

prophet Muhammad at Ubar (Ibn Sa'd 8:312–319; Bayhaqī 1985: 5:150; Ibn Ḥajar 1995:8:408–410, 2:502–504). She is responsible for convincing Abū Ṭalḥah, who is reported to have been the richest man in Medina, to follow and donate his wealth to the cause of the prophet Muhammad.<sup>3</sup> The night following the death of her first son with Abū Ṭalḥah, Umm Sulaym is said to have visited the prophet Muhammad and was told that she would give birth to a special son whom the Prophet would name 'Abdallāh (Bayhaqī 1985:6:198–200; Bukhārī 23:41, 71:1; Ibn Ḥajar 1988:3:169; Muslim 38:5).

Some parallels between the depiction of Umm Sulaym and the characterization of Mary Magdalene in Christian sources highlight the role played by Umm Sulaym vis-à-vis the body of the prophet Muhammad. Not unlike Umm Sulaym, Mary Magdalene seems to have had a unique relationship with Jesus as one of the small group of named female disciples (Mark 15:40–41, 47, 16:1, Matt 27:55–56, 61, 28:1, Luke 8:1–3, 24:10, Gospel of Peter 12:50–51; Manichaean Psalmbook 192:21–11 and 194:19; King 2003, *passim*). She supported Jesus with her wealth (Luke 8:3), is one of three disciples to receive special instructions from Jesus (Dialogue of the Savior, NHC III:139; Sophia of Jesus Christ, NHC III,4; Gospel of Mary, BG 8502,4 in Robinson; Marjanen 1996:*passim*), and is often conflated with other female figures linked to the body of Jesus such as the woman who kisses and washes the feet of Jesus with her hair in Luke 7:36–50 (Ricci 1994:*passim*; Malvern 1975:*passim*). Mary Magdalene is said to be the most beloved of Jesus' disciples, the one whom Jesus kissed on the lips (Gospel of Philip 63:33–64:9 in Robinson 131–151). She is portrayed as the bride of Jesus in the allegorical exegesis of the Song of Songs by Hippolytus, and is said, by certain groups considered to be heretical, to have had sex with Jesus and consumed his bodily emissions (Epiphanius II:8,1–3; 2,5; 21,1; 27,1; Marjanen 1996:194–199; Goehring 1988:329–344; Benko 1967:103–119; Dummer 1965:191–219). Mary Magdalene is specifically linked with the dead and resurrected body of Jesus. She is present at the Crucifixion, leads a group of women to anoint the corpse of Jesus (Matt 28:1, Mark 16:2,

<sup>3</sup> See Ibn al-Jawzī on Q 3:92; Ṭabarī 1992 on Q 3:92. According to al-Suyūṭī on Q 3:92, Abū Ṭalḥah offered his wealth to the prophet Muhammad who ordered him to give it to his relatives, so he gave it to Ḥassān b. Thābit and Ubayy b. Ka'b.

Luke 24:1, John 20:1; Milburn 1988:58–63), touches Jesus' body out of love rather than disbelief (Matt 28:9), and is the main disciple who speaks in the post-resurrection dialogues with Jesus.

Umm Sulaym, and other members of her family, are also associated with the detached or “dead” body of the prophet Muhammad through his saliva, sweat, and hair (Gril 2006:37–57). According to Anas b. Mālik, it is Abū Ṭalḥah alone who is able to descend into the tomb of the Prophet's daughter Umm Kulthūm, and Ibn Hishām reports that Abū Ṭalḥah was the one in charge of digging the tomb for the prophet Muhammad (Ṭabarī 1879–1901:2302; Ibn Hishām n.d.:1021). Ibn Sa'd reports that Muḥammad b. Sīrīn had sweat collected from the Prophet by Umm Sulaym the mother of his patron and former slave-master Anas b. Mālik.

Muḥammad b. Sīrīn reported that Umm Sulaym said: “The apostle of God used to take a nap in my house. I would spread out for him a leather mat and he would nap on it. He would sweat and I would take *sukk* [type of perfume] and knead it with his sweat.” Muḥammad said: This *sukk* was requested from Umm Sulaym, and she gave me some of it. Ayyūb said: I requested some of this *sukk* from Muhammad and he gave me some of it, and I have it now. When Muhammad died he was embalmed with this *sukk*. He used to knead it so that his corpse could be embalmed with it. (Ibn Sa'd 1:314)

According to a report mentioned in al-Bukhārī, Anas b. Mālik is also said to have been embalmed in *sukk* made from the sweat and hair of the prophet Muhammad.

Anas reported that Umm Sulaym used to spread out a leather mat for the Prophet and he would take a nap at her place on that mat. He said that when the Prophet was sleeping she would take his sweat and hair and collect it in a bottle and knead it with *sukk*. When Anas b. Mālik was about to die he requested that he should be embalmed in that *sukk*, so he was embalmed in it. (Bukhārī 56:761; Ibn Ḥajar 1988:11:59–60)

Burial with the hair and nails of the prophet Muhammad is attested for other people as well, such as the first Umayyad Caliph Mu'āwiyah buried in Damascus and Sidī Ṣāḥib Abū Zam'ah al-Balawī buried in Qairouan.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>) On these various traditions, see al-Ṭabarī 3:262; Ḥawrānī 46–47; Meri 2001:35;

It is perhaps significant that the sweat from the prophet Muhammad was collected while he was asleep, just as during his farewell pilgrimage he is in a sacralized state removed from regular life.

‘Abdallāh b. Ja‘far reported from ‘Ubaydallāh b. ‘Amr from ‘Abd al-Karīm from al-Barā’ b. Zayd that the Prophet took a nap in the house of Umm Sulaym on a mat and he sweated. The apostle of God woke up and Umm Sulaym was wiping his sweat. He said: “Umm Sulaym what are you doing?” She said: “I am taking this *barakah* which is coming from you.” (Bukhārī 56:761; Ibn Ḥajar 1988: 11:59–60)

The sweat of the Prophet is described as a “blessing” [*barakah*], the term used to designate the hairs distributed from the prophet at the end of his farewell pilgrimage. That the sacralized state of the pilgrim [*iḥram*] represents and is linked with death is evident from the restrictions placed on the pilgrim and the rituals performed during the visit to the sanctuary, which is itself considered a graveyard. The body of the pilgrim is not to be tended so that the hair and nails grow, and the specific clothes worn by the pilgrim not only resemble but are used as a burial shroud (Bukhārī 34:31, 23:78, 65:115; 23:20–22; Abū Dā‘ūd 20:78; Nasā’ī 21:41, 24:46, 96–98; Dārimī 8:35; Ibn Ḥanbal 1:220, 266). The body of the prophet Muhammad is described as being white as snow and smelling of musk, as a dead body annointed for burial, when he is at Minā the place of sacrifice. When entering into the sacralized state required for the pilgrimage, the pilgrim is literally “made sacred” or “sacrificed” so that the body is effectively dead until the desacralization [*iḥlāl*] when the burial shroud and the hair and nails are removed, and a domesticated animal is slaughtered as a substitute for the life of the pilgrim. Only when the domesticated animal is sacrificed does the body of the pilgrim return to its normal, living state. In this sense, the hair and nails distributed at the farewell pilgrimage could be understood as being removed from a body of the Prophet that has been redeemed by his sacrifice of the camels.

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Margoliouth 1937:20–27; Dabbāgh 1968, no. 609, 1:97. For Biographical info on Balawī, see Ibn Ḥajar 1995:7:129; Ibn al-Athīr n.d., no. 5915; Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr n.d., no. 3009. On the Tomb of Mu‘āwiyah, see Ḥasanī 1944:434–441.

## Gift of the Body

The comparison of the Islamic accounts of the prophet Muhammad's farewell pilgrimage with a broader range of cultural models suggests that sacrifice and the distribution of hair and nails is linked to cosmogonic myths. In the ancient Near East the creation of the world and the construction of civilization is often described as a battle in which a primordial king slaughters and dismembers a wild creature usually thought to signify chaos and disorder. The *Enuma Elish* recounts how the first king Marduk constructed the heavens and the earth with the corpse of Tiamat (Gunkel:passim). That Tiamat is a personification of the "Sea" is evident from the Akkadian word for "sea" [ti'amtum, tām̄tum] and from the mingling of Tiamat with the sweet waters of Apsu at the beginning of the story (Jacobsen 1968:104–108). Ugaritic texts depict the primeval battle between Ba'al Haddu and the "Sea" [Yam], "River" [Nahr], or the seven-headed serpent Lotan (Dietrich and others 1976, passim; Bordreuil and Pardee 1993:63–70). Psalm 74:13–14 refers to the cosmogonic battle of Yahweh with the "Sea" [Yam], crushing the heads of the "Serpent" [*tannînîm*] and the Leviathan. Yahweh defeats the "Serpent" and the "Sea" in Psalm 68:22–23 and defeats the serpent "Rahab" in an act of creation in Psalm 89:10–11 (Oden 1992:1:1162–1170; Loewenstamm 1969:96–101; Lincoln 1975:42–65; Ivanov and Toporov 1968:1180–1206).

In a number of these accounts it is the king's body itself that is being offered for the origins of civilization. The Yashts (19.30–39) relate how the royal "glory" [*khvarneh*] of the first Iranian king Yima was divided to make the three primary social classes: king, warriors, and others (Darmesteter 1987:2:292–293; Lincoln 1975:121–145, esp. 131; Greppin 1973:232–242; Hidding 1959, passim; Christensen 1934, vol. 2; Benveniste 1938:534–35). In the ancient Near East the king was identified with fertility, his body, its adornments, and the symbols he carried representing the tree and water of life from which society received its sustenance (Widengren 1951:esp. 42–58). The list of the royal acts of Hammurabi includes his construction of temples for the gods, walls for protection, and the building of canals for irrigation (ANET 269–270; Ungnad 1928:11, 178–182). In ancient Egypt the Pharaoh was deified as a personification of the Nile, the sun, the animals, and the earth itself which provided the means for society to

exist (Frankfort 1948:esp. 148–214). The Hawaiian king is supposed to sacrifice a human victim as a substitute for his own body which is the source of the natural and social order of Hawaiian society (Valeri, *passim*). Daniel 4:7–9 describes Nebuchadnezzar as a great tree from the flesh of which all creatures feed. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (4.655–662) describes how Atlas is made into a mountain, and 2 Enoch 30:8 relates the creation of Adam's body from the different material components of creation (Fletcher-Louis 2002:esp. 88–135; Widengren 1980:297–312).

The Vedic fire sacrifice commemorates the cosmic battle at the origins of the world in which the body of the primal man [*puruṣa*] was dismembered for the creation of the natural world and the construction of society (Heesterman 1993:esp. 45–85; Levi 1898:*passim*; Oldenberg 1919:*passim*; Grottanelli 1980:207–235; Mayrhofer-Passler 1953:182–205; Lincoln 1986:esp. 142). Some scholars have interpreted Yama as a first-king figure, related etymologically to the Iranian Yima and the Latin Remus, comparing the offering of his body in death, as described in *R̥g Veda* 10.13, with the sacrifice of the primal man in *R̥g Veda* 10.90 (Inden 1998:41–91; Mus 1968:539–563; Dandekar 1945:1:194–209; Lincoln 1985:132–133; Heras 1958, volume 2; Karmarkar 1967:7–10; Frenkian 1943:118–131; Puhvel 1975:146–157; Kretschmer 1909:288–303). The *Karunāpuṇḍarika Sūtra* relates the story of a king who offers his body as a “mountain” of flesh that feeds beings for thousands of years (Ohnuma 2007:246). A Tibetan text describes how, as King Shibi in a former life, the Buddha offered his body to save the life of a dove and provide justice in his kingdom (Parlier 1991:131–60; Sivaramamurti 1942:228; Ohnuma 2007:244–245). In the *Jātakas*, the Buddha as King Maitribala offers lumps of his flesh from his body to feed visitors, and King Manicuda gives pieces of his flesh and blood to a hungry visitor (Bendall 1957:158–159; Vaidya 1959:46–49; Ohnuma 2007:228–229; Granoff 1990:225–239). As Prince Mahāsattva, the Buddha throws his body off of a cliff to feed a family of hungry tigers (Durt 1998:57–83, esp. 57). In his description of the Zalmoxis cult among the Getae of the Black Sea, Herodotus (4.94–96) explains how the messenger representing the people is sacrificed for the welfare and fertility of the people. (Eliade 1971:*passim*). From ancient China there are reports of emperors and government



officials who exposed their bodies to the sun or lit themselves on fire in order to bring rain to their people (Schafer 1957:130–84; Cohen 1978:244–65; Benn 1998:295–322).

It is not uncommon, not only in cosmogonic myths but in practice, for people to offer parts of their living bodies as gifts tied to the origins of society. Not unlike the case of the Buddha as King Shibi and King Maitribala offering living pieces of his body, Buddhist monks detach parts of their bodies, making relics of “dead” body parts, often as a symbol for a renunciation of the whole living body (Shukla 2008, *passim*). Numerous examples from medieval China report on individual monks cutting off and offering fingers and other body parts. Monks are reported to burn off limbs and fingers, and burn incense and brand parts of their bodies as partial versions of the practice of autocremation or renouncing their bodies through an act of self-sacrifice (Benn 1998:295–322; Durt 1998:57–83; Chong 1990, *passim*; Cooper and Sivin 1973:203–72). The distribution of one’s own body parts as relics for the sake of the life of others is a significant tenet of Buddhism but is also found in the Mediterranean and Middle East (Strong 1979:221–237; Yün-hua 1965:243–268; Brekke 1998:287–320; Ohnuma 1998:323–359). Herodotus (4.71) reports that the Gerrhoi cut off their ears, shave their hair, cut their arms, foreheads, and noses, and poke arrows through their hands as sacrifices of their bodies to the tombs of their kings (Lincoln 1991:188–197). Shaving, in particular, is considered to be a sign of offering oneself as a gift, as evidenced from the description of the Nazirite vow in Judges 13:6 and the Levites in Numbers 8:8 (Olyan 1998, esp. 615–617; Knohl 1995: *passim*). In 1 Kings 18:28 the priests of Ba‘al gash themselves with swords and spears to make their offering more acceptable, and the worship of the Syrian goddess at Mabbog included people shaving their heads and opening gashes in their arms (Lucian 6; Robertson Smith 1894:321). Israelite law specifically forbade such practices (Lev 19:28, 21:5, Deut 14:1) but such practices are widely attested among Arabs and the Greeks (Wellhausen 1897:160; Robertson Smith 1894:323). Not unlike the Buddhist practice of removing limbs and fingers, Pausanias and other ancient authorities interpret removing hair and opening wounds as substitutes for human sacrifice (Pausanias 3.16.10; Robertson Smith, 1894:321; Krehl 1863:33; Goldziher 1886:1:248).

The Islamic and pre-Islamic ritual of the *‘Aqīqah* links shaving, sacrifice, and the gift of one’s body to the sustenance of society through the birth of male and female heirs. That the *‘Aqīqah* is linked to lineage and kinship ties is indicated by the reports that the prophet Muhammad required two sheep for a boy and one for a girl, and that the modern practice can be restricted only to the birth of boys (‘Umrānī 2002:4:439–440; Abū Dā’ūd 16:4; Ibn al-Jārūd 1987:911–912; Ṭahāwī 1:457; Morgenstern 1966:esp. 36–47). The *‘Aqīqah* includes shaving the newborn’s head, sacrificing a domesticated animal, and giving the weight of the hair in silver or gold to buy food for the poor (‘Umrānī 2002:4:441–442; Mālik b. Anas 26:2; Tirmidhī 4:99; Hākim al-Nisābūrī 4:237; Bukhārī 77:276; Muslim 37:13). There are reports, however, that the prophet Muhammad practiced other rituals associated with the birth of his and others’ children such as the placing of a chewed date in the mouth of the infant (Ibn Ḥajar 1988:9:484; Bukhārī 71:1). Reports of other practices, including burial of the hair in the ground, offering the shorn hair to deities, and evidence of the practice among Christians as well as Muslims, indicate that the *‘Aqīqah* was a continuation of pre-Islamic sacrifices (Ibn Ḥajar 1988:9:484; Bukhārī 71:1; Abela 1884, no. 27, 79–118). Some scholars have suggested that the *‘Aqīqah* is a continuation of the pre-Islamic practice of sacrificing first-products, including produce, animals, and children, to God (Chelhod 1955:esp. 99–100; Kriss and Kriss-Heinrich 1960–62:1:31–52; Aubaile-Sallenave 1999:125–160).

The description of the *‘Aqīqah* in Muslim jurisprudence and the practice of the prophet Muhammad shows that the practice was understood and intended as a ransom for the infant or the father. Muslim jurists relate that the prophet Muhammad allowed people to continue the pre-Islamic custom of wetting the head of the child with the blood of the sacrifice, and that using saffron as a substitute for the blood is allowed (‘Umrānī 2002:4:443–444; Ibn Mājah 27:16). The prophet Muhammad is said to have performed the *‘Aqīqah* on his grandsons for the purpose of removing their sins.

It is sunnah that this [*‘Aqīqah*] be performed on the seventh day because the prophet Muhammad did this for al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn on the seventh day, then he named them and ordered that the wrongs [*al-adhī*] be removed from

their heads. (ʿUmrānī 2002:4:440; Hākīm al-Nisābūrī 1990:4:237; Bayhaqī 1985:9:299–300)

In another report the prophet Muhammad is said to have rubbed a chewed date on the palate of the newborn son of Asmā' bt. Abī Bakr and the people were pleased because they had been told that the Jews had used sorcery to make them barren. It is related that ʿĀ'ishah said the prophet Muhammad came to her son, rubbed his palate and washed him after he urinated on him (Ibn Ḥajar 1988:9:484; Bukhārī 71:1). In the Egyptian town of Ismailiyah the *ʿAqīqah* sacrifice is made to the local saint who is bound to protect and redeem the child (Curtiss and Ward 1902:158, 202).

The *ʿAqīqah* sacrifice and hair cutting is accompanied by a prayer uttered by the father or the child's guardian representing the father. In Egypt the prayer includes the father's statement that the domesticated animal is to redeem his son.

God, this *ʿAqīqah* is a ransom for my son — its blood for his blood, its flesh for his flesh, its bone for his bone, its skin for his skin, its hair for his hair. God, make it a ransom for my son from hell fire. (Lane 1890:191; Henninger 1981:311–318; Westermark 1926:393–402)

In an *ʿAqīqah* prayer recorded in India, the life and body of a goat is offered in the place of the son.

Almighty God, I offer in the stead of my own offspring, life for life, blood for blood, head for head, bone for bone, hair for hair, skin for skin, in the name of God do I sacrifice this he-goat. (Sharīf 1921:30; Henninger 1981:312)

Note that in both of these prayers it is the homology between the body parts of the child and the domesticated animal, not unlike the correspondences found in Indo-European sacrifices tied to cosmogonies, that is stated to justify the use of the substitute in the sacrifice (Koppers 1936:320–25). The correspondence is also between the child and the father. According to reports preserved in the *Lisān al-ʿarab* of Muḥammad b. Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1312), the prophet Muhammad said that the cutting of the child's hair and the sacrifice of the sheep is required to make the son be of intercessory value for the

life of the father (Ibn Manẓūr 1990, s.v. ‘QQ, 10:255–261; Jaussen 1927:39n14; Morgenstern 1966:37–39). The practice of a man vowing to “sacrifice an animal so as not to be deprived of his old age” is attested from a village in Jordan (Granqvist 1965:22; Wilken 1886–7:225, 345).

Substituting the son for the father, and a domesticated animal for the son is a prominent theme in pre-Islamic and Islamic Arabia. In his poetry, Jarwal b. Aws al-Ḥuṭay’ah (d. ca. 650–668) tells of a son who offers his body as food to a traveling stranger to save his empty-handed father from shame (Ḥuṭay’ah 1987:336–338; Stetkevych 2000a:89–120; Goldziher 1892–93). The son is redeemed by a fattened onager but the offering of his body fulfills the obligation to offer that which is most valuable to the guest.<sup>5</sup> It is evident, in some cases, that the sacrifice of the child is a requirement for the father, based on a vow he has made or as expiation (Hooke 1952:2–17; Smith and Doniger 1989:189–224; Coomaraswamy 1941:359). The exegesis of Q 37: 101–107 relates that Abraham’s son instructed his father to take precautions when preparing to kill him so that he would not allow his compassion for his son to cause him to fail in fulfilling his obligation (Calder 1988:esp. 379, 382, 384; Firestone 1990:esp. 107–110; Khan 1999:50–64). In an episode closely resembling the prophet Muhammad’s camel sacrifice, Ibn Hishām and al-Ṭabarī describe how Muhammad’s father ‘Abdallāh was ransomed from being sacrificed by his father ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib by the substitution of 100 camels sacrificed at Mecca, the meat of which fed all the people there (Ibn Hishām n.d.:97–100; Ṭabarī 1879–1901:1075–1077; Haldar 1945:161–98; Drijvers 1995: 109–119; Gawlikowski 1977:253–274; Tubach 1995:121–135). The redemption of children by the sacrifice of animals is not unattested in the Bible and the ancient Near East, and the requirement to sacrifice children appears, in Leviticus 26:29 and Ezekiel 20:26, to be a punishment for the sins of the parents (Levenson 1993:esp. 3–54; Mosca 1975:passim; Heider 1985:passim; Eissfeldt 1935:passim; Henninger 1981:passim; Dussaud 1910:77–109:passim).

<sup>5</sup> Compare the story of Ḥātim al-Ṭā’i in al-Isfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 19:6700–6705; Stetkevych 1994:104–105; Stetkevych 2000b:79–130; Huizinga 1955:esp. 58; Mauss 1967:esp. 102.

In pre-Islamic Arabia, as in other contexts, the sacrifice of a domesticated bull was understood as redeeming the heads of families to ensure the continued fertility of the region on which the community was dependent (Dostal 1983:196–213; Ryckmans 1975:365–373; Ryckmans 1973:327–334). It is evident from the pre-sacrificial treatment of the animal that the bull represents both the community and the fertility of the land, allowing the sacrifice to serve as a symbolic commemoration of the agricultural accomplishments of the society (Dostal 1983:esp. 197–199; Evans-Pritchard 1953:181–198). What allows for an animal to redeem a person seems to be the dependence of society upon certain domesticated animals for its continued existence. The Nuer, for example, cannot live without their cattle for they depend upon them for milk, tools, ornaments, sleeping-hides, fuel, and commerce (Evans-Pritchard 1956:passim; de Heusch 1985:passim). Likewise, in pre-Islamic Arabia, the domesticated camel is an essential source of milk, transportation, and commerce but more significantly it is “the” example of a domesticated animal because it allowed for the existence of society in the desert (Robertson Smith 1894:300–309; Bulliet 1975:passim; Chelhod 1955:passim). As such, the domesticated camel epitomized a certain level of social development that was necessary for its breeding and upkeep.

The sacrifice of domesticated camels is tied to the significance of the camel as an epitome of domesticated animals (J. Z. Smith 1987:191–205; Rose 1954:213–227). In Islamic law, the camel is the sacrifice par excellence and all camels are to be treated as though they were domesticated (Bukhārī 45:2–4, 9, 11, 78:75; Muslim 31:1–6; Abū Dā’ūd 10:4; Ibn Ḥanbal 3:473, 4:175; Ibn Rushd 1996:3:361–403). The exegesis of Q 88:17 extols the virtues of the camel [*ibl*] as a wonder of creation compared with the heavens. According to the exegesis of Q 5:27, the first sacrifice, performed by Abel, was the sacrifice of a camel and was performed at Minā, suggesting that animals were domesticated for the purpose of being sacrificed since they were not eaten until the time of Noah (Bork-Qaysieh 1993, passim; Stillman 1974:231–239). Exegesis of the fall of Adam and Eve in Q 2:34–126 and elsewhere explains that God instructed Adam to establish the sanctuary at Mecca as an earthly substitute for the lost garden of Eden. The initial rites, before the time of Abraham, would not have included

the running between al-Ṣafā and Marwah nor the visit to ‘Arafat, and the sacrifice of Abel at Minā would have been the first ritual act at the sanctuary. Restrictions on pilgrims at Mecca, including the prohibition on sexual relations, killing wild animals, cutting hair and nails, and wearing sewn clothing, seem to be reminders of a pre-fall existence in Eden. It is also at Mecca that Adam and Eve first had sex, cultivated food, and developed the arts of civilization (Wheeler 2006:85–87). The first sacrifice at Minā was only possible, and necessary, once Adam had founded the Meccan sanctuary and his son had domesticated animals.

It would seem that the significance of the prophet Muhammad’s sacrifice at Mecca is “sociogonic” rather than cosmogonic in character. The sacrifice does not recall the origins of the world inasmuch as it remembers the fall from Eden that necessitated the Meccan sanctuary as a place to perform sacrifices. This is consistent with the account of the mahāpuruṣa or Prajāpati whose dismembered body parts correspond to the different social classes (Lincoln 1986:esp. 45; Heesterman 1993:esp. 83–85). The sacrifice of horses in the ancient Near East and India are linked to the origins of kingship.<sup>6</sup> Indo-European conceptions of cattle, in raids and sacrifices, appear to reflect a pastoral nomadism tied to initiation rites among the warrior class (Brenneman 1989:340–354; Arabagian 1984:107–142; Sayers 1985:30–56; Sauvé 1970:173–191). That biblical and Islamic sacrificial practices, especially the act and significance of substitution, function to establish patrilineal ties is demonstrated from a wide range of social contexts in which animal sacrifices are attested (Jay 1992:passim; Combs-Schilling 1989:passim). The Ayādgār-i Jāmāspīg (4.39–41) tells how territory and social classes were divided among the three sons of the primordial king Frēdōn (Lincoln 1986:146; Lincoln 1985:esp. 77–79). King Aśoka redistributes the relics of the Buddha to delineate the boundaries of the Buddha-world which would constitute his kingdom (Strong 1983:passim; Reynolds 1977:374–389; de La Vallée Poussin 1913:257–90; Chizen 1922:1–29; Gadjin 1973:25–53). The link between body distribution, sacrifice, and territorial spread is also found

<sup>6</sup> See kings of Judah (2 Kings 23:11), Rhodes (Pausanias 3:20.4); Doniger 1980:esp. 149–282; Koppers 1936:279–411; Le Roux 1963:123–137.

in the early Christian accounts of the Last Supper of Jesus (Grottanelli 1988:3–53; Detienne and Vernant 1979:passim; Henninger 1981: 1–16). The hair and nails of the prophet Muhammad, along with his footprints preserved in stone, the episodes of his life preserved in ḥadīth reports, and other implements from his daily life, were dispersed among his followers to become markers of status and authority in mosques, madrasahs, and mausoleums throughout the world.

The camel sacrifice and distribution of hair signify the origins of Islamic civilization. Sacrifice and hair cutting are linked with death, and the rituals associated with the Ḥajj and ‘Umrah are connected to funerary practices at the Meccan sanctuary. As practices marking a transition from the “dead” or pre-fall state of the pilgrim, both sacrifice and hair removal are redemptive in the sense that the offering of one’s body and a substitute animal provide for the pilgrim’s entry into civilized life. In this sense, the pilgrimage is a kind of “rite of passage” in which a domesticated animal, whose existence recalls the origins of the society, is offered in the place of the individual who, by virtue of making the sacrifice, offers himself to perpetuate the social order. The prophet Muhammad’s sacrifice and distribution of the camels’ bodies, as food and as articles of culture, initiate his followers into his group just as the *‘Aqīqah* establishes lineage from father to son.<sup>7</sup> The Prophet’s distribution of his hair and nails as relics are not best understood to be magical links to his living presence. As dead pieces of his body, his hair and nails are reminders of his sacrifice — the sacrifice commemorating the origins of Islamic civilization, and the primal sacrifice it imitates, performed by Adam’s children as the original ritual at the future cult center in Mecca established as the earthly substitute for the lost Eden at the origins of human civilization.

It is not necessary to take this episode from the life of the prophet Muhammad as an accurate record of his actions, but rather as an attempt to generate a retelling of Islamic origins that was meaningful for the milieu in which it was related.

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<sup>7</sup> Compare the sacrifice at the funeral of the Egyptian leader Muḥammad ‘Alī in imitation of earlier Umayyad practices with the Safavid camel sacrifices of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See Lane 1883:261 and Lane 1890:1:268; Rahimi 2004:451–478.

The generations that worked at the biography of the Prophet were too far removed from his time to have true data or notions; and, moreover, it was not their aim to know the past as it was, but to construct a picture of it as it ought to have been according to their opinion. (Snouck Hurgronje 1880:32)

The accounts of the Prophet's sacrifice and distribution, and the complex of ties among the different cosmogonic myths with which these accounts overlap and share concepts, are to be understood as the genesis of Muslim conceptions of the civilization he founded.

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## The Jaina Cult of Relic Stūpas

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### Abstract

This article gives an overview of recent findings on the thriving cult of bone relic *stūpas* in contemporary Jaina culture. Although Jaina doctrine rejects the worship of material objects, fieldwork in India on the hitherto unstudied current Jaina mortuary rituals furnished clear evidence for the ubiquity of bone relic *stūpas* and relic veneration across the Jaina sectarian spectrum. The article discusses a representative case and assesses the significance of the overall findings for the history of religions. It also offers a new theoretical explanation of the power of relics.

### Keywords

Jaina relic *stūpas*, mortuary rituals, Vallabha Samudāya, cultural unconscious, theory of generalized symbolic media, relics as social forms

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## Introduction

It is a common stereotype of textbooks on world religions that Jains never worshipped the remains of the Jinas, and consequently never developed a ritual culture parallel to the cult of relics in Buddhism. In his well-known study *The Jaina Path of Purification*, P. S. Jaini (1979:193) recalls that neither “the *Śrāvakācāras*,” the medieval texts outlining the rules of conduct for the Jaina laity, “nor the practices of Jainism give any indication that a cult of relic-worship once flourished within the tradition. No *stūpas* housing the remains of Jaina teachers have yet been discovered.” This verdict is echoed by K. Bruhn (1993:54): “There is also the issue of ‘actual evidence’. There were Jaina *stūpa*s but they did not survive. As a consequence, the *stūpa* became a *Buddhist* monument.” Apart from isolated myths and legends in canonical and medieval Jaina (Jain) literature depicting the veneration of the relics of the Tīrthaṅkaras by the gods, there is no indication of bone relic worship in early and medieval Jainism to date.<sup>2</sup> Yet, although Jaina doctrine rejects the worship of lifeless, *acitta*, material objects, intermittent fieldwork in India between 1997 and 2009 on the hitherto unstudied contemporary Jaina mortuary rituals furnished clear evidence for the ubiquity of bone relic *stūpas* and relic veneration across the Jaina sectarian spectrum today.<sup>3</sup> This article offers an overview and interpretation of these recent, somewhat unexpected, findings on the thriving cult of bone relic *stūpas* and the ritual role of the materiality of the dead in contemporary Jaina culture, focusing on one

<sup>2</sup> See Bhagwānlāl 1885:143f.; Leumann 1885:500–4; Bühler 1890b:328f.; Smith 1901; Schubring 1935/2000 §25; Marshall 1951 II:463; Shah 1955/1998:54ff.; Choudhury 1956:47, 65, 93f.; Shāntā 1985:127ff.; Jain 1987:136; Settā 1989; Sastri et al. 1992; Kasturibai & Rao 1995; Dundas 2002:219, 291, n. 4; Laughlin 2003:200; Bronkhorst 2005:53; Dundas 2007:54; Quintanilla 2007:38; Hegewald 2009:135–7. See *infra* for a re-assessment of the evidence.

<sup>3</sup> British Academy funded research in 2000–2001 (Research Grant 2001 APN 3/522) produced the first documentation of two modern Jaina bone relic *stūpas*, a *samādhi* and a *smāraka*, constructed by the Śvetāmbara Terāpanth. Subsequent fieldwork, funded by the Central Research Fund of the University of London (Research Grant 2002/2003 AR/CRF/A), demonstrated that relic *stūpas* do not merely feature as functional equivalents of temples in some of the anti-iconic Jaina traditions but are also constructed by segments of the Mūrtipūjaka and Digambara traditions.



representative example,<sup>4</sup> that is, the *samādhi mandira*, or funeral monument,<sup>5</sup> of Sādhvī Mṛgāvātī of the Mūrtipūjaka Śvetāmbara tradition on the premises of the Vallabha Smāraka Km 20, J.T. Karnāl

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the Mṛgāvātī Samādhi Mandira, which represents the *Mūrtipūjaka* tradition, the names and dates of consecration of three further *stūpas*, confirmed by field-research, of segments of the three other principal Jaina denominations will suffice here: Pravartaka “Marudhar Kesarī” Miśrīmāl (1891–1984), three relic shrines: (a) Marudhar Kesarī Pāvan Dhām Jetārāṇ 6.1.1985 (*samādhi sthala*), (b) Asthi Kakṣa, Sojat 5.5.1992, (c) Puṣkar (*Sthānakavāsī*: Śramaṇasaṅgha Raghunātha Dharmadāsa Gaṇa); Ācārya Tulsī (1914–1997), two relic shrines: (a) Ācārya Tulsī Śakti Pīṭha, Gaṅgāśahar 14.12.2000, (b) Ācārya Tulsī Smāraka Lāḍnūṃ 7.9.2000 (installation of the relic vessel) (*Terāpanth*); Bhaṭṭāraka Cārukīrti (died 1998) Mūḍabidarī Samādhi 22.12.2000 (*Digambara*). There are many *samādhis* of Digambara *munis* such as Ācārya Śāntisāgara “Dakṣiṇa” (1872–1955) in Kunthalgiri or Muni Sumatisāgara (1917–1994) in Sonagiri which, according to informants, contain relics. See Flügel 2001, 2004, 2008a, 2010b, forthcoming a for evidence on 122 triangulated Jaina cases, the majority (going back to 1804) listed independently for the present writer by Dineś Muni 2002, Gautama Muni 2009, Sādhvī Dr Ārcanā 2009 and Ācārya Dr Śivmuni 2009, four mendicants of two different *gaṇas* of the Sthānakavāsī Śramaṇasaṅgha. In addition to these cases, many of which were personally investigated, 10 of 28 other investigated memorials, the oldest being the Dādā Samādhi Mandira of Hira Vijaya Sūri (1526–1595) of the Tapā Gaccha near Unā, are suspected relic *stūpas*, 16 probably not, and 2 certainly not. Funerary monuments have been constructed even for religious leaders of the Jaina lay movement started by Śrīmad Rājacandra (1867–1901). According to local informants, the *samādhis* of Rājacandra in Rājkoṭ and of Parama Pūjya Śrī Bāpuji Śrī Lāṭakcand Māṇekcand Vorā (1905–1997) at the Rāj Sobhāg Āśram in Sāyalā/Gujarāt are both relic shrines. So is the “Satsthānak,” the *samādhi* for “Dādā Bhagavān” Ambalāl Mūljibhāi Paṭel (1908–1988) of the Akram Vijñān Mārg in Kelanpurī near Vaḍodarā.

<sup>5</sup> Anti-iconic Jaina traditions avoid the word *mandira* and simply speak of a *samādhi* (*nirmāṇa*). Generally, the term *samādhi* refers to a relic shrine and the term *smāraka* to a commemorative shrine. An interviewee stated that “a *samādhi* is constructed for *pūjā*, a *smāraka* only for *darśana* and meditation” (H. L. Jain, personal communication, Ludhiyānā 28.12.2009). Yet, frequently the words *stūpa* (P. *thūpa*), *samādhi* and *smāraka* are used as synonyms in Jaina scriptures and contemporary Jaina discourse to refer both to monuments containing mortal remains of the special dead as well as to mere commemorative shrines: these can be conceived following Fleming 1973:178 as “points on a continuum.” Morphology, on which Shah 1955/1998:57 rested his argument that in the Jaina tradition the symbolism of the *stūpa* was replaced by representations of the *samavasaraṇa*, is not decisive. Compare the debates on the passage in the ŚB 13.8.3 concerning the difference between square and round burial mounds;

Road, Alipur, Dillī (Delhi).<sup>6</sup> The findings demonstrate that the Jaina cult of relics is not only a feature of lay religiosity, but is usually deliberately fostered by mendicants seeking to perpetuate the influence of their deceased teachers and thus strengthen their own position *vis à vis* competing sects through the construction of relic *stūpas* and the distribution of ashes from the funeral pyres and of memorabilia such as photographs and amulets.

### Mṛgāvātī Samādhi Mandira

Sādhvī Mṛgāvātī Śrī (1926–1986) (Fig. 1) died of breast cancer on 18 July 1986 in the residential halls attached to the Vallabha Smāraka Jaina Mandira, twenty kilometers north of Delhi. She was born on 4 April 1926 into a Saṅghavī Dasa Śrīmālī Jaina family in Sardhār, a village near Rājkot in Gujarāt. In 1938, after the death of her father, two brothers and one sister, she took initiation together with her mother Sādhvī Śilavatī Śrī (1893–1967) from Ācārya Vijaya Vallabha Sūri (1870–1954) (*dikṣā-dātā*) and Sādhvī Dāna Śrī (*dikṣā-guruṇī*)<sup>7</sup> into the “progressive” Vallabha Samudāya,<sup>8</sup> a now independently organized

between *stūpas* and tombs, for instance in Barua 1926:17 and Przlusky 1935:199f.; and between De Marco 1987:241 who argues that *stūpas* and Vedic *śmaśānas* “correspond to a single architectural type,” and Bakker 2007:40 who strictly distinguishes relic *stūpas* (“*edūka*”) and funerary monuments (“*aidūka*”).

<sup>6</sup> My first of five visits to the Vallabha Samāraka site goes back to 1988. On 26–28 October and 17–18 December 2003 formal interviews on the *samādhis* of the Vallabha Samudāya were conducted in Mumbaī and Delhi with monks and nuns and lay sponsors of the Vallabha Smāraka complex.

<sup>7</sup> Dāna Śrī succeeded the first nun of the *samudāya*, Sādhvī Deva Śrī (1878–1947).

<sup>8</sup> Vijaya Vallabha Sūri was born 26.10.1870 (1927 Kārtika Śukla 2) in Vaḍodarā in Gujarāt, initiated by Ācārya Vijaya Ānanda Sūri’s *pra-śiṣya* Muni Harṣavijaya on 5.5.1887 (1944 Vaiśākh Śukla 13) in Rādhanpur, became *ācārya* on the 1.12.1924 (1981 Mārgaśīrṣa Śukla 5) in Lahaur, and died in Bombay 22.9.1954 (2010 Bhādrapada Kṛṣṇa 10: Gujarātī calendar). He was one of the most influential *ācāryas* of the Tapā Gaccha in the twentieth century and an advocate of modern education, social reform (in the Jain community the abolition of casteism), and of Gāndhī’s national freedom struggle. His order permits mendicants to use microphones, the use of “violent” flush toilets in big cities, nuns to give public lectures, and other modern practices that are rejected by orthodox Mūrtipūjaka mendicants. For a summary of his biography and the history of the Vallabha Samudāya, see Śāh 1956.



Figure 1. Sādhvī Mṛgāvatī Śrī (1926–1986), official photograph.

monastic order of the Tapā Gaccha Vijaya Śākhā tradition.<sup>9</sup> It was due to her personal influence that the long-planned construction of the Vallabha Smāraka was started in 1979 and finally completed in 1989. The Vallabha Smāraka is a temple complex commemorating the achievements of Vijaya Vallabha Sūri, not least his *camatkāra* powers which at the time of partition in 1947 protected the lives of his monastic and lay disciples who were fleeing with him, under fire, from the Ātmānanda Gurukula in Gujrāmvalā in Western Pañjāb to Amṛtsar in

<sup>9</sup> On the early history of the Tapā Gaccha see Dundas 2007:17–52, on modern history and organization Cort 2001:40–8 and Flügel 2006:317–25. On the Vallabha Samudāya, see MJV 1956; Shimizu 2006. For Mṛgāvatī's biography, based on a book of her disciple Sādhvī Suvratā, see *ibid.*:68, and N. N. 2003.

Eastern Pañjāb, and in some cases on to Ludhiyānā and Delhi.<sup>10</sup> The focus of attention (though not of ritual) at the site is his naturalistic portrait statue in the main hall, *mandapa*, in front of the smaller temple.<sup>11</sup> The construction of a national memorial, *smāraka*, in Delhi was planned already in 1954 during Vijaya Vallabha Sūri's funeral ceremonies in Mumbai, where his *samādhi mandira* is located.<sup>12</sup> But for many years nothing happened. In 1973, Vijaya Vallabha Sūri's successor Ācārya Vijaya Samudra Sūri (1891–1977) therefore directed the charismatic and learned *sādhvī* Mṛgāvatī to spend *cāturmāsa* in Delhi to channel some of the enthusiasm for the preparations of the national celebrations of Mahāvīra's 2500th Nirvāṇa Mahotsava in 1974 into the half-forgotten construction project. Mṛgāvatī had gained a reputation for inspiring the construction of numerous temples, memorials, monastic residencies, schools and hospitals all over India.<sup>13</sup> In 1974, due to her personal influence, the Śrī Ātmā Vallabha Jaina Smāraka Śikṣaṇa Nidhi trust was created in the presence of Vijaya Samudra Sūri, who had come to Delhi to represent the Mūrtipūjaka tradition at

<sup>10</sup> Fascinating eye-witness accounts were documented by Shimizu 2006:63f., who also refers to Duggar 1989:535. For other reported miracles, see *ibid.*:473f.; Jaya Ānanda Vijaya 1989:19f. and SAVJSSN p. 2: "At times he would even extend physical protection by using his super and divine powers." Despite the fact that Vijaya Vallabha Sūri in his youth was engaged in fierce polemical exchanges with Sthānakavāsī Jains and supporters of the Ārya Samāj in the Pañjāb, most internal sources, such as the contributors to MJV 1956, agree with SAVJSSN p. 2: "He always endeavoured for unity and solidarity amongst the Jain community. He had completely identified himself with the freedom struggle. He patronised the use of Khadi, Swadeshi and Hindi even though his mother tongue was Gujarati." For further biographical literature, see Shimizu 2006. For an overview of his polemical works, see Flügel 2008b:190–204.

<sup>11</sup> See Titze 1998:136, 235. Jina images are placed in a small shrine on the more elevated first floor right behind and above Vijaya Vallabha Sūri's statue. In the Śrīmad Rājacandra temple in Āgas, the Jina images are also placed above the statue of the relatively recently deceased religious leader. On memorials for Jaina ascetics see Laidlaw 1985; Babb 1996:102–36; Dundas 2007:54f. Unlike Granoff 1992:181; Babb 1996:103, 110f. and Bakker 2007:30, n. 67 who regard Jaina temples and images as elements of a mortuary cult, Hegewald 2009:87, argues that "spaces dedicated to the memory of Śrīmad Rājacandra should technically not be considered as temples, but as funerary or commemorative structures."

<sup>12</sup> Next to Seth Motiśāh Jaina Mandira, 137 Love Lane, Baikala, near Mumbai Zoo.

<sup>13</sup> See the long list of her achievements in N. N. 2003:3–18.

the state celebrations of Mahāvīra's death anniversary, and suitable land located near the Great Trunk Road from Delhi to the Pañjāb was procured on 15 June 1974. Yet the project progressed faster only when Mṛgāvātī returned to Delhi again for two years. After prior competitive bidding for the privilege of performing the first ritual acts,<sup>14</sup> *bhūmi pūjā* or *bhūmi khaṇana*, the earth breaking ceremony, was performed by Mr. Lālā Ratancand Jain on 21 July 1979, and *śilānyāsa*, the foundation stone ceremony, by Ms. Lālā Kharatī Lāl Jain on 29 November 1979.<sup>15</sup> Finally, on 10 February 1989, the consecration, *pratiṣṭhā*, was celebrated in grand style in the presence of many monastic and social dignitaries.<sup>16</sup> The assembly was presided over by Ācārya Vijaya Indradinna Sūri (1923–2002), who had succeeded the deceased Vijaya Samudra Sūri. Mṛgāvātī's second most celebrated achievement was the solicitation of the release from the Archaeological Survey of India of a five hundred year old idol of Rṣabha, which tribals at Ranakpur used to venerate, which she made accessible for worship again in a newly constructed Jaina temple in Kāṅgaṛā (N. N. 2003:5).<sup>17</sup>

In recognition of her achievements, which favorably compare with the accomplishments of many Jaina *ācāryas*, and because of her devotees'

<sup>14</sup> Bidding for ritual privileges is common in Jaina culture, but not routinely performed in all Jain sects. Traditionally, women do not bid, but exert influence through their husbands. See Reynell 1987:327f.; Balbir 1994:121; Kelting 2009:288f.; Chhapia & Choksi 2009.

<sup>15</sup> The ceremony was a key event of the 24th Convention of the All India Śvetāmbara Jaina Conference which was held on the premises, chaired by Dīpcand Gardī from Mumbaī (N. N. 2003:14).

<sup>16</sup> For further details on dates and actors, see Shimizu 2006:68–71, 170f. On 12–15 June 1974 land was bought by the trust; 21 July 1979 *bhūmi pūjā* by Ratancand Jain; 28 November 1979 bidding won by Kharatīlāl Jain; 29 November 1979 *śilānyāsa*; 27–28 September 1986 Haribhadra Sūri I Conference; 27–28 September 1987 Haribhadra Sūri II Conference; 10 February 1989 *pratiṣṭhā*, presided over by Ācārya Indradinna Sūri in the presence of the *ācāryas* Ratnākara Sūri, Nityānanda Sūri, Virendra Sūri and Janaka Sūri.

<sup>17</sup> “Thus, she was conferred the title of *Kāṅgaṛā Tīrthoddhārikā*” (Shimizu 2006:72). See Balbir 1994:125 on the significance of Mṛgāvātī's propagation of educating nuns. Yet, “[a]lthough Mṛgāvātī Śrī Jī is highly respected by the community members, her anniversary is not celebrated as with the four chief *ācāryas* of Vijaya Vallabha Samudāya (Vijaya Ānanda Sūri, Vallabha Sūri, Samudra Sūri and Indradinna Sūri) in the annual religious calendar” (Shimizu 2006:73f.n.).

desire to retain the spiritual link to her, that had proved to be beneficial in other respects as well,<sup>18</sup> from 1.1.1987 a *samādhi* was constructed for Mṛgāvātī at the site of her cremation, *agni saṃskāra sthala*, next to the Vallabha Smāraka (Fig. 2). It was consecrated on 1.11.1996.

To the visitor, the building is presented as an expression of the continuing devotion to Mṛgāvātī by Sādhvī Suvratā Śrī and her disciples Sādhvī Suyāśā Śrī and Sādhvī Suprajñā Śrī and dedicated devotees from Delhi and beyond, who desired “to do for her what she did for Vijaya Vallabha Sūri.”<sup>19</sup> According to Śāntilāl Jain, one of the main protagonists and patrons of the project, the Mṛgāvātī Samādhi Mandira was deliberately constructed as “the first *sādhvī samādhi* in the Vallabha community” (cited in Shimizu 2006:73).<sup>20</sup> More precisely, it was the first *samādhi mandira* for a Jaina woman in the Vallabha Samudāya, since at least one simple undated commemorative platform, *cabūtarā*, had earlier been erected at the place of cremation of Mṛgāvātī’s chief disciple Sādhvī Sujyeṣṭhā Śrī (1928–1985), who had died nine months before her, on 9 November 1985. This memorial is inscribed with the name Sujyeṣṭhā Samādhi (Fig. 3).

Amongst modern Jain *samādhis*, the Mṛgāvātī Samādhi Mandira stands out because of its peculiar circular dome-like shape which, at

<sup>18</sup>) Devotees readily furnish evidence of the effects of her blessings for health, educational accomplishments or material wellbeing. “According to Śāntilāl Jain Jī... [t]he capacity of her spiritual power, knowledge and leadership attracted lay followers to her” (Shimizu 2006:73f.). A list of leading politicians who visited Mṛgāvātī is published in N. N. 2003:18.

<sup>19</sup>) Mṛgāvātī died before the completion of the Vijaya Vallabha Smāraka, shortly after the death of her chief disciple Sādhvī Sujayeṣṭhā in 1985. Mṛgāvātī’s disciple Sādhvī Suvratā and lay supporters from Delhi were instrumental for the construction of the *samādhis* for both *sādhvīs* within the Vijaya Vallabha Smāraka complex (Vijaya Vallabha Smāraka, Brochure). The land was procured by Ms. Sudha Sheth. Major donors were reportedly Śāntilāl Jain, Ratancand Jain, Lālā Rāmlāl (deceased), and Rāj Kumār Jain. Inspiration was also received from Vijaya Indradinna Sūri’s disciple Ācārya Virendra Sūri (Interview, Vallabha Smāraka Annex 18.12.2003).

<sup>20</sup>) Many ancient Jaina inscriptions referring to women as donors have been documented. But only a handful of older commemorative monuments for Jain women exist. In the Buddhist tradition “none of the inscribed... *stūpas* of the local monastic dead found at Indian monastic sites were erected for a nun” (Schopen 1992/1997:237, n. 74).

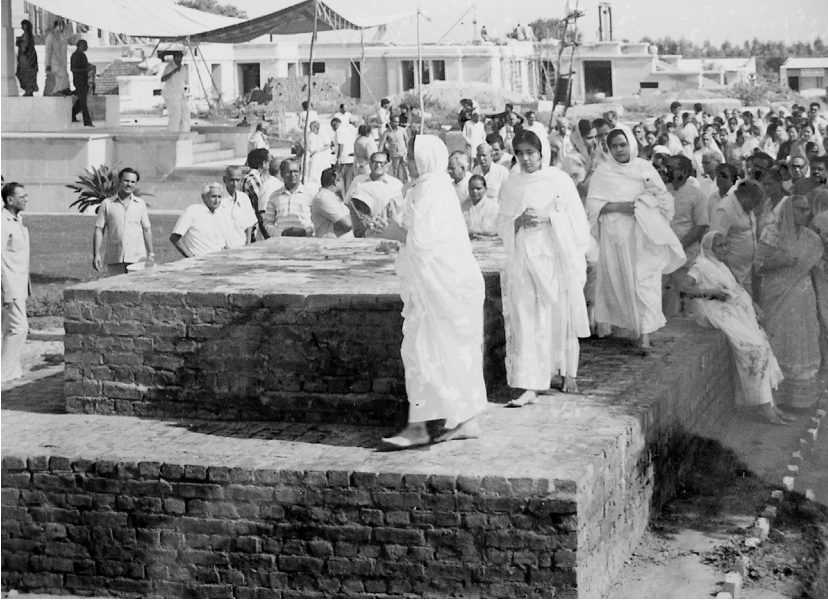


Figure 2. Sādhvī Suvratā Śrī and her disciples circumambulate the cremation platform of Mrgāvātī, Vallabha Smāraka Photo Album.

first sight, either resembles a burial mound, an overgrown ancient Buddhist *stūpa* or a stylized Jaina *samavasaraṇa*<sup>21</sup> (Fig. 4).

From the former it is distinguished by a publicly accessible hall in its interior, and from the latter by the absence of representations of a wish-fulfilling tree, *caitya-vṛkṣa*, and/or a *gandhakuṭī*, perfumed chamber, the legendary dwelling place of the Jina, on top.<sup>22</sup> The basic design

<sup>21</sup>) A dome shaped roof was also given to the relic *stūpa* of “Ācārya” Muni Suśil Kumār (1926–1994), the Ahimsā Paryāvaraṇa Sādhana Mandira in New Delhi, designed by Sādhvī Dr Sāadhanā, the leader of the Arhat Saṅgha I of the Nāthūrāma Jīvarāja Sthānakavāsī tradition, on which see Flügel (in press a).

<sup>22</sup>) On the *gandhakuṭī* of the Jina, see Shah 1955/1998:56. According to him, iconographic representations of the assembly of the four-fold community around a Jina, *samosaraṇa* (S. *samavasaraṇa*), are the Jaina equivalent of the Buddhist *stūpa*. Morphologically, “the *samavasaraṇa* has for its prototype the big *stūpa* (the *harmikā* of a *stūpa* may be compared with a *Gandhakuṭī* or *Devacchand-pīṭha* for the Jina)” (ibid.:93), though the functions of these structures are entirely different. For photos of modern architectural representations, which closely follow the mythological paradigms of the Āgamas, see Titze 1998:232, Hegewald 2009:388 cover, etc.



Figure 3. Commemorative platform for Sādhvī Sujyeṣṭhā Śrī (1928–1985), photo by the author, Vallabha Smāraka 18.12.2003.

is a structure of seven or eight<sup>23</sup> superimposed round brick terraces covered with earth and grass. The upper terrace is rounded off like a mountain peak or a *harmikā*. As in canonical descriptions of Siddhāyatana, the paradigmatic heavenly Jaina temple, there are three large gates leading into the interior of the shrine from east, west and north.<sup>24</sup> The eastern and western gates are usually closed, at least in winter. Only the large portal facing north towards the Vallabha Smāraka always remains open (Fig. 5).

This is the main entrance to the spacious windowless room at the center of the *samādhi*. Looking from the outside into the shrine through the northern gate the visitor can already make out the head of the white marble statue of Mṛgāvatī, which is lit up with electric lamps,

<sup>23</sup>) Because of overgrowth, this is difficult to decide without recourse to the original drawings. See Shah 1955/1998:128 on the mythical eight terraces, *aṣṭa-pada*, created by Emperor Bharata on Mount Kailāśa, where his father Tīrthaṅkara Ṛṣabha died.

<sup>24</sup>) Cf. Shah 1955/1998:57.



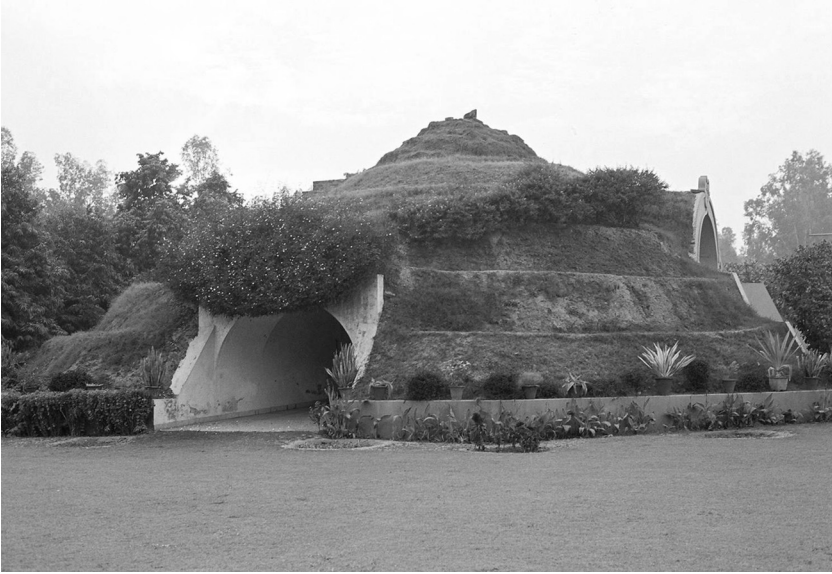


Figure 4. Mṛgāvatī Samādhi Mandira, photo by the author, Vallabha Smāraka 18.12.2003.

creating the impression that, in the midst of darkness, Mṛgāvatī's head is the only source of illumination<sup>25</sup> (Fig. 6). On entering the dark interior the features of the entire statue become visible, placed on a base of black stone and covered with a wooden glass cabinet (Fig. 7).

Mṛgāvatī is represented in a naturalistic way, squatting in the *padmāsana* posture, hands on her lap and the brush, *oghā*, the symbol of monastic tradition, placed to her right. The statue faces the Vallabha Smāraka in the distance. Immediately in front of her is a small round pedestal made of white marble, with engraved *caraṇa pādukās*, representing Mṛgāvatī's footprints. To prevent their worship, the *caraṇa pādukās* are also under glass. An attached sign proclaims: "*caraṇam meṃ cāval va mīṭhā na caḍhāyem!*" Do not offer sweets and rice to the feet!" Of course, rice and sweets are invariably found next to the sign.

Shimizu (2006:73f.) recalls a local quarrel over the Mṛgāvatī image and points to the fact that the worship of portrait statues of female

<sup>25</sup>) Cf. Kramrisch 1946:162 on the symbolism of womb and seed in Hindu temple architecture.



*Figure 5.* Main entrance of the Mṛgāvatī Samādhi Mandira, photo by the author, Vallabha Smāraka 18.12.2003.



*Figure 6.* Illuminated statue and footprint image of Sādhvī Mṛgāvatī inside the Mṛgāvatī Samādhi Mandira, photo by the author 18.12.2003.



Figure 7. Statue and footprint image of Sādhvī Mṛgāvatī inside the Mṛgāvatī Samādhi Mandira, photo by the author 18.12.2003.

ascetics, beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, is a new trend in the Jain tradition not accepted by everyone.<sup>26</sup> According to Laidlaw (1995:263), “the first female Jain renouncer to become a fully canonized saint”<sup>27</sup> was Pravartini Vicakṣaṇa Śrī (1912–1980) of

<sup>26</sup> Babb 1996:206, n. 19 found no evidence of great magical powers being attributed to nuns. However, *tapasvinīs* and renowned nuns such as Mṛgāvatī and Vicakṣaṇa (ibid.:55f.) provide good examples. The performance of *pūjā* to statues of deceased ascetics is controversial in the Mūrtipūjaka tradition, which reserved the full nine-limbed *candana pūjā* for Jina statues. See Cort 2001:114. On *pūjā* at *dādāguru* shrines, see Laidlaw 1985; Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994; Laidlaw 1995:270f.; Babb 1996:127; Laughlin 2003; Dundas 2007:54f. and Hegewald 2009:82–8.

<sup>27</sup> Much depends on the word “fully” here. The Shānakavāsī *mahāsati* Pārvatī Devī (1854–1939) may be referred to as an earlier example of a “canonized” highly respected nun. See Flügel 2008b:201–3. The Tīrthaṅkara Mallinātha, who for

the Kharatara Gaccha, the chief rival of the Tapā Gaccha within the Mūrtipūjaka traditions. She also died of cancer. Her painted marble statue, one of the first realistic portraits of a Jaina nun,<sup>28</sup> was consecrated in 1986, the year of Mṛgāvati's death, on the premises of the popular Dādā Bārī temple on Motī Dūngarī Road in Jaipur where it became an object of worship.<sup>29</sup> A *samādhi mandira* with another portrait statue was constructed for her at the Mohan Bārī shrine on Galta Road outside Jaipur, the place of her demise and cremation, where two further *samādhi mandiras* for Muni Śānti Vijaya (died 1943) and Sādhvī Sajjana (died 1989) were constructed (Babb 1996:55, 102f.). However, extant commemorative shrines for Jaina nuns seem to be almost as old as the earliest extant *samādhis* for prominent monks, if less frequent.<sup>30</sup> M. U. K. Jain (1975:96) mentions three “tombs,” that

Śvetāmbaras was a female, must be regarded as a mythological figure. See Roth 1983.

<sup>28</sup>) Vicakṣaṇa Śrī's statue holds a mouth shield, *muhapattī*, in her left hand and a rosary, *mālā*, in her right. Like Mṛgāvati, she is juxtaposed to a male ascetic, in this case the statue of Jinakuśala Sūri, who is the main focus of veneration at the Dādā Bārī, although his *samādhi mandira* is located in Mālpurā (Babb 1996:111). See Shāntā 1985/1997:270, Plate 10 for a photo of another portrait statue of Vicakṣaṇa Śrī in Delhi (Meherauli). See the photographs of modern naturalistic statues of Jaina monks in Hegewald 2009:82–7, and Laidlaw's 1995:258–67 and Babb's 1996:111ff. analyses of the iconography.

<sup>29</sup>) Like Mṛgāvati's statue, Vicakṣaṇa Śrī's images are nowadays covered by a locked glass cabinet to prevent *dravya pūjā*. See Babb 1996:102. In support of his theory of alternative Jaina “embodied ontologies,” Laidlaw 1995:262–7 argues that the illness of Vicakṣaṇa Śrī is iconographically highlighted in the facial expression to stress “suffering as a religious virtue” (ibid.:266). This is questionable, since suffering is not visibly depicted. The famous photos of the emaciated Śrīmad Rājacandra shortly before his death from chronic diarrhea are similarly interpreted as depictions of the “body of a dualist” who departed from “normal Jain practice” and turned the cultural practice of fasting “into a concerted attack on the body.”

<sup>30</sup>) According to Shah 1987:17, the first commemorative *pādukās* and *niśidhis* were constructed in the medieval period. Yet, the Hāthigumphā inscription of the second or first century BCE already mentions a Jaina *niśidhi*. The earliest *nicitikaḥ* (P. *niśidhiyā*, etc.), or funerary monuments for Jaina monks who starved themselves death, in this case mere “epigraphs engraved on the bare summit of boulders” in Tamil Nadu, were dated in the sixth century CE by Mahadevan 2003:135f., who notes the influence of earlier practices in Karnāṭaka. Settā 1989:215 stressed that the *niśidhis* in Karnāṭaka, at least the later pavilions, “were apparently not erected at the place where the commemorated breathed their last. In other words, they were not

is, *samādhis*, for the Digambara nuns, *āryikā*, Āgama Śrī (1426), Pratāp Śrī (1631), and of Pāsamatī Mātājī (died 12.2.1767), whose *samādhi sthalī* at the Pārśvanātha Janma Sthala in Bhelūpur/Vārāṇasī features a commemorative plaque placed under a newly built *chatrī*. Next to it is a similar *chatrī* covering *pādukās* which mark the *samādhi sthal* of Ācārya Vidyāsāgara's disciple Muni Saṃyam Sāgara (died 14 June 1984). Laughlin (2003:140, n. 339) found two *pādukās* dated 1675 and 1684 presumably located at Ābū for Mūrtipūjaka nuns donated by other nuns (one from a branch of the Kharatara Gaccha) but no *samādhi mandiras*. Shāntā (1985/1997:254–6) describes three twentieth-century *samādhi mandiras*, for the Kharatara Gaccha nuns Pravartinī Puṇya Śrī (1858–1916) in Jaypur and Pravartinī Suvarṇa Śrī (died 1932) in Bīkāner, and for the Tapā Gaccha nun Sādhvī Sunandā Śrī (died 1968) at the foot of Mount Ābū. She notes that the invitation card for the *pratiṣṭhā* of the *guru mandira* and of the *cāraṇa pādukās* of Sunandā Śrī in 1976 details a long series of *pūjās*, which demonstrates that the *samādhi* is a place of worship.<sup>31</sup> Though Shāntā (ibid.:256, n. 348) believed that “reformed communities, the Sthānakavāsīs and the Terāpanthīs, who perform no temple worship, do not erect *samādhi-mandiras*,” two *samādhis* for the Terāpanth *sādhvīs* Mālūjī (died 1996) and “Tapasvinī” Pannājī (1907–2000) in Lāḍnūṃ, which are simple commemorative platforms, *cabūtarās*, presently without *pādukās* and *chatrīs*, and many *samādhis* for Sthānakavāsī nuns in places such as Ambālā and Āgrā can be added to this list.<sup>32</sup> None of these *samādhis* for Jaina nuns features a portrait statue like the Mṛgāvātī Samādhi, though the production of naturalistic statues of deceased *sādhvīs* and *āryikās* became increasingly popular from the

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necessarily built on the mortal remains of the dead.” Hindu and Buddhist *pādukās* are evident from first centuries CE.

<sup>31</sup>) See Shāntā 1985/1997:270, Plate 9 for a photo of the *pādukās* inside the shrine.

<sup>32</sup>) Flügel 2010b:24–6. In the Terāpanth today, only memorials for *ācāryas* are officially ornamented with “royal” *chatrīs*, never *pādukās*. However, in the 1970s a tall *chatrī* (“Smṛti”) was erected by family members of Sādhvī Dhyānavatī (1901–1970) at the place of her cremation at the cemetery, *śmaśāna*, of the Osvāl caste in Lāḍnūṃ. Like several other *chatrīs* for Terāpanth monks and nuns in caste cemeteries, this memorial was unsanctioned, and is not publicized because, generally, places of cremation of common mendicants remain unmarked and are not remembered as places of significance.

twentieth century onwards, also amongst Digambaras (Hegewald 2009: 85). However, most display a photograph.

The creation of Mṛgāvati's *samādhi mandira* and statue was motivated in part by the competitive sectarian dynamic within the Jaina tradition, whose popular appeal relies to a large extent on the belief in the miraculous powers, transmittable through touch, of Jaina ascetics and some of their material representations. Through the construction of commemorative shrines, often in the vicinity of temples or *upāśrayas*, sectarian history is inscribed into the topography of India in the hope that this will help perpetuate the influence not only of the teachings of the Jinās but specifically of the respective monastic traditions.<sup>33</sup> The competitive construction of *samādhis* in the medieval and modern period is intrinsically linked with intra-denominational Jaina sectarianism, beginning in the eleventh century in the Śvetāmbara tradition. The history of the doctrinal acceptance of the religious role of miracles and so-called magical power, *iddhi* (S. *ṛddhi*) in the Jaina tradition is yet to be written.<sup>34</sup> Though canonical texts, such as *Uvavāiṃ* (Uv) 24–27, *Viy*<sub>1</sub> 8.2 (340a ff.), are full of references to supernatural powers of Jaina ascetics, Bruhn (1954:118) pointed out that, in contrast to the biographies of the Buddha, early Jaina texts tend to limit and rationalize the role of miracles and the power of gods and ascetics in terms of the Jaina *karman* theory. According to Granoff (1994: 150f.), even after Hemacandra's standardization of the imaginative post-canonical Śvetāmbara narratives of Mahāvīra's funeral and the veneration of his relics by the gods in his twelfth-century *Triṣaṣṭi-śālākāpuruṣacaritra* (TŚPC XIII), medieval Jaina biographies rarely narrate post-cremation miracles of local monks and are generally “not interested in depicting the monks as continuing objects of lay worship.” Reports of post-mortem appearances and miracles in the seventeenth-century biographies of the Tapā Gaccha *ācārya* Hira Vijaya Sūri<sup>35</sup> and of prominent *ācāryas* in the *paṭṭāvalis* of the Kharatara Gac-

<sup>33</sup> On layered identities in Jaina patterns of worship, see particularly Babb 1996:135.

<sup>34</sup> See Flügel forthcoming b.

<sup>35</sup> On Hira Vijaya Sūri's funeral rites, his *samādhi* and post mortem miracles, see the original sources compiled by Mahābodhi Vijaya 1997–8; also Commissariat 1957 II:248.

cha are described by Laughlin (2003:178) as “exceptions,” though further examples, more frequently of later dates, such as the miracle shrine of Sādhvī Vicakṣaṇa Śrī in Jaipur, can be added. Textual and epigraphic history thus seem to point to a progressive development, from the Kuṣāṇa period onwards, of schematic accounts first of the death, funeral and post-funeral rites and miracles of selected Jinas and later of exceptional monks (rarely nuns) who, in the milieux of individual sects (*gaccha*, *gaṇa*, *sampradāya*, etc.), became objects of veneration in their own right.

Laidlaw (1985, 1995:69–80), Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994:21ff.) and Babb (1996:111) showed that the worship of deceased but non-liberated male ascetics, believed to be reborn as gods, is now a “central feature of the religious life of Śvetāmbar Jains associated with the Khartar Gacch.” The followers of the Kharatara Gaccha worship four of their prominent ascetic reformers and miracle workers, called Dādāgurus,<sup>36</sup> for whom they erect special shrines, *dādā-bāṛīs*, all over India.<sup>37</sup> These shrines feature alternatively iconic or aniconic representations of these saints, *guru mūrtis* or *carāṇa pādukās*, housed in structures which are generally “modeled on the funerary cenotaphs [*chatrī*] that are so common a feature of Rajasthan” (ibid.:112). In the *dādā-bāṛīs* constructed at their places of cremation footprints rather than portraits are the central focus of worship. In 1962, three hundred and forty-four independent shrines and two hundred and ten temples already existed in which *dādā* representations were worshipped (ibid.). In the meantime, the number has considerably increased. Following the example of the Kharatara Gaccha, several Tāpā Gaccha traditions, such as the Vallabha Samudāya, began to develop *dādāguru* cults as well.<sup>38</sup> But the *dādāguru* cult is still given more importance by the

<sup>36</sup> See also Cort 2001:221, n. 27. The veneration of statues and *carāṇa pādukās* of the Kharatara Gaccha Dādāgurus at places in Rājasthān, such as Delavāḍā, Mālpurā, Dhuleva or Ābū, has been mentioned already by K. C. Jain 1963:135.

<sup>37</sup> Jinadatta Sūri (1075–1154), Jinacandra Sūri (1140–1166), Jinakuśala Sūri (1280–1332), and Jinacandra Sūri II (1541–1613). The Kharatara Gaccha *paṭṭāvalī* mentions the erection of a *stūpa* in Delhi to the memory of Jincandra Sūri, who reportedly had “a jewel in his head,” as became evident at his cremation (Klatt 1882:248).

<sup>38</sup> For instance, the seventeenth-century Hīra Vijaya Sūri Dādā Samādhi Mandira (current name). See Laughlin 2003:16; Dundas 2007:54f. and Phyllis Granoff,

Kharatara Gaccha, most likely because it is not, like the Tapā Gaccha, split in many collateral branches, but maintains a single centrally organized monastic tradition. The recent development of a cult of miracle-working *dādāguru* shrines<sup>39</sup> in the Vallabha Samudāya similarly demonstrates its ambition to establish itself as an independently organized order within the Tapā Gaccha tradition.<sup>40</sup>

Local respondents give a clear explanation for the peculiar shape of the Mṛgāvātī shrine. Engineer Vinod N. Dalal,<sup>41</sup> a devotee of Mṛgāvātī who was personally involved in the construction of the *samādhi*, recalled Mṛgāvātī's own wishes. Before she died, intentionally at the Vallabha Smāraka,<sup>42</sup> she said: "I want to remain in a cave, *guphā*, where I can continue to worship god without being disturbed."<sup>43</sup> The design of the *samādhi mandira* thus represents a meditational cave inside a mountain.<sup>44</sup> Its outer form is echoed by a "stupa-like" shrine at Hastinapura, called Dhyāna Mandira, which Hegewald (2009:391) describes as "a Jaina temple structure dedicated to meditation."<sup>45</sup> Mṛgāvātī's characterization of her "cave" tallies well with this description, although the shrine is nowhere designated as a cave, nor as a place for

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E-mail 5.1.2009: "The Vijayamāhātmya has a section, clearly added on, about Vijayadevasūri's post-mortem appearances and miracles. The Hīravijaya has a similar section and the miracles occur at the *stūpa*."

<sup>39</sup> See Samudra Sūri's 1956 article on "Dādā Gurudev" Vijaya Ānanda Sūri.

<sup>40</sup> For definitions of Jaina "school," "order," and "sect," see Flügel 2006:366, n. 8. On organizational segmentation within the Tapā Gaccha, see *ibid.*:319–24.

<sup>41</sup> Interviewed in the administrative office of the Vallabha Smāraka, 17.12.2003.

<sup>42</sup> On the phenomenon of death and burial *ad sanctos* in the Jaina tradition, see Flügel 2010b:24–26.

<sup>43</sup> The word "god" is deliberately ambiguous. It can refer to the soul, the Jinas, as well as to Vijaya Vallabha Sūri towards whom the statue of Mṛgāvātī is oriented. "God" as the source of Mṛgāvātī's supernatural powers is described in one of her biographies: "H. H. never sought to approach political leaders. On the other hand they came to H. H. with head bowed. . . . [list of politicians follows] . . . Unparalleled reverence and devotion to God were the source of her spiritual power" (N. N. 2003:19).

<sup>44</sup> Confirmed by M. P. Sheth, interviewed 17.12.2003 at the Vallabha Smāraka.

<sup>45</sup> "It is a stupa-like building, consisting of an earthen mound overgrown with grass (Plate 691). The structure contains a cave-like windowless circular chamber, housing a large sculptural representation of the sacred syllable "*hṛm*," placed on a lotus platform" (Hegewald 2009:390).



meditation. The motif of mountain caves frequented by meditating Jain ascetics acquiring wish-fulfilling powers is attested already in the Āgamas. In the Śvetāmbara context, the most popular source is the Saṅgha-stuti, an allegorical hymn at the beginning of the canonical Naṃdī (NS<sub>1-2</sub> I.12–17/18). Its final section, the so-called Mahāmandaragiri-stuti, eulogizes the mythical Sumeru, a mountain filled with gold, silver and gem-stones and overgrown with magical herbs and forests.<sup>46</sup> This text is the most likely source of inspiration for the design of the building.<sup>47</sup> The magic mountain is a metaphor of the ideal *saṅgha*, the Jaina community. The herbs that grow on its slopes stand for the *labdhis*, attainments or powers,<sup>48</sup> including the healing touch, *āmarśa-auṣadhi*, of the Jaina ascetics in their beautiful “caves of compassion for life,” *jīva-dayā kandarā*. The ascetics themselves are symbolized by “wishing-trees,” *kalpa-vṛkṣas*, which cover the mountain and offer shelter to the visiting Jaina laity.<sup>49</sup> The cave/mountain distinction could also be read as an analogy of the Jaina soul/body distinction. But this is not explicated in the text.<sup>50</sup>

The outer form of the shrine thus represents the magical Mt. Sumeru, which itself is a metaphor of the ideal religious community, with the virtuous “wish-fulfilling” ascetics at its center.<sup>51</sup> Yet, there is an

<sup>46</sup> The oldest Jaina depiction of Mt. Sumeru, echoed by Saṅgha-stuti vv. 12–18, is in JDP<sub>1-2</sub>. For Jain cosmography, see Kirfel 1920/1990.

<sup>47</sup> This is yet to be confirmed through interviews, but seems obvious.

<sup>48</sup> For classical lists of *labdhis* (P. *laddhi*), see Uvavāiya (Uv<sub>1-2</sub>) 24–27, Tiloyapaṇṇattī (TP) II.4.1078–1087.

<sup>49</sup> “As the Meru mountain remains unmoved and stable even in the midst of terrible hellish storms and deluge, so remains this religious organization of the *Jina* amidst the verbal tirade of the antagonists” (Amar Muni, commentary to NS<sub>2</sub> 18, p. 13).

<sup>50</sup> See Kramrisch 1946:161–76 on the image of mountain and cave, *garbha-grha*, in Hindu architecture, and on the symbolism of darkness and light, seed and sprouts. On Buddhist mountain caves in Thailand, and the symbolism of stages of knowledge, see Tambiah 1984:280ff. Similar meditational caves are still used by Jains on Mt. Ābū. On the analogy of mountain cave and the *samādhi* in Hindu tantrism, see White 1996: 333.

<sup>51</sup> The analogy of great Jaina ascetics with heavenly wishing trees is a common motif in Jaina (and Buddhist) literature. See for instance the Śālibhadracarita I.83 ff., in Bloomfield 1923:265, and the summary version of the same story and motif in TŚPC<sub>2</sub> Ch. 10, p. 255. For an analysis of the social implications of its plot, see Flügel

invisible dimension of this building, unknown to most visitors and never publicized. Located some fifteen to twenty feet underneath Mṛgāvātī's statue is a small relic chamber with a tiny vessel filled with charred bones and ashes from her cremation pyre. On the surface, there is no indication whatsoever that the Mṛgāvātī Samādhi is, in effect, a relic *stūpa*, that is, pragmatically defined, a building of any shape constructed for the purpose of housing bone relics,<sup>52</sup> amongst other functions.<sup>53</sup> On the contrary, attempts to physically worship the *mūrti* and the *pādukās* are systematically obstructed, albeit not entirely prevented.<sup>54</sup> Since relic worship blatantly contradicts Jaina doctrine, in truth, none of the local patrons and trustees will easily admit the fact that bone relics of Mṛgāvātī are enshrined under the artificial mountain and, if questioned, generally respond in an evasive manner. Apparently, Mṛgāvātī herself never explicitly talked about the preservation of her body relics or the construction of a *stūpa*, although she personally

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2010a:380–402. The Kharatara Gaccha Dādāgurus are also conceived as “wish-fulfilling trees,” *kalpataru*. See Babb 1996:126.

<sup>52</sup> Acharya 1927/1978:574 defines *stūpa* as a “Name of edifices, which serve as receptacle for a relic or as monument.” Though the *samādhi* at the site of cremation is always given primacy, a *smāraka* or memorial at a different place may also contain bone relics. It is therefore impossible to rely on the common *samādhi-smāraka* distinction or on the word *stūpa* to discriminate relic *stūpas* from commemorative monuments. Some modern *smāarakas* built at sites away from the place of cremation, such as the Asthi Kakṣa of Muni Miśrīmal and the Ācārya Tulsī Smāraka mentioned in footnote 4, display the relic vessels openly, which *samādhis* at sites of cremation never do. Compare Viy 10.5.a ff. (502b ff.) and Rāy<sub>2</sub> 240, 276, 351 on the worship of the bones of the Jinas, *jīṇa-sakabhā*, kept in reliquaries hanging on hooks from commemorative pillars. See also Toussaint 2006:60 on the Catholic practice of open display starting in the thirteenth century; Strong's 2004a:143f. interpretation of the practice of hiding relics; and the volume edited by Kippenberg and Stroumsa 1995 on concealment.

<sup>53</sup> Hegewald 2009:136, on morphological grounds, identifies a hitherto unstudied and apparently unlabeled structure at Gajapantha as a Jaina “*stūpa*,” remarking: “An essential feature of this structure, and of most stupas in general, whether they have been built for a Jaina or a Buddhist audience, is that they usually are solid constructions, which have no accessible internal space, and cannot usually be entered.”

<sup>54</sup> Located next to the *samādhi* is a very popular Padmāvātī shrine where rites aiming at wish fulfillment are openly performed without any specifically Jaina content (though Padmāvātī is a Jaina goddess).

inspired the erection of four *samādhi mandiras* for Vijaya Vallabha Sūri and one for Vijaya Samudra Sūri.<sup>55</sup> Given the reticence of the minority of Jains who know of the presence of relics in a particular shrine and the denial of the majority who do not know, considerable detective work is required to amass sufficient evidence of bone relic preservation and oblique worship through touch in each suspected case.

After several visits and some negotiation, the leading trustee of the Vallabha Smāraka, who refused to be implicated, arranged a private meeting on site with V. N. Dalal on 17 December 2003, whose description of the architectural design of the shrine confirmed the initial intuition of the present writer, based on previous investigation of relic shrines amongst the Terāpanth and Sthānakavāsī Jaina traditions (Flügel 2001, 2004, 2008a), that the Mṛgāvātī Samādhi Mandira is a genuine relic *stūpa*. A meeting on 18 December 2003 with the resident Ācārya Virendra Sūri and Muni Rajendra Vijaya, who both openly advocated the construction of relic shrines and proudly presented bone relics and ashes from the cremation pyre of the late Ācārya Vijaya Indradinna Sūri, forced the leading trustee to an indirect admission of officially unspeakable practices, clandestine yet public, in which the monastic and local leadership of the fourfold community of the Vallabha Samudāya collude. Suddenly, photo albums emerged from a cupboard by Sudarśanā, a female devotee who had just requested and received from Ācārya Virendra Sūri some of the ashes from the pyre of his guru Ācārya Vijaya Indradinna Sūri that he had shown the present writer. The albums on display did not include pictures of the relics themselves nor of the relic vessel, but the excavated relic chamber is clearly visible in the photos of the rites of *śilānyāsa*, the consecration of the brick foundations of the shrine, which involved ritual blessings by

<sup>55</sup> Since Vijaya Vallabha Sūri was cremated in Mumbaī, technically, none of the “*samādhis*” and “*smārakas*” that were constructed in the Pañjāb and in Delhi can be called “*samādhi mandira*.” There is anecdotal evidence, however, that charred bones and ashes were transported from Mumbaī to North India and preserved to be entombed under one or other of these commemorative shrines. According to the architect J. C. C. Sompura, the Vallabh Smārak is not a relic shrine but the Mṛgāvātī Samādhi is (personal communication, Kuppakalām 28.12.2009). See p. 418.



Figure 8. A photo of Mṛgāvātī is held up to the cameras during the foundation stone ceremony 1 January 1987, Vallabha Smāraka Photo Album.

Mṛgāvātī's successor Sādhvī Suvratā Śrī in the presence of her two disciples (Figs. 8 and 9).

Similar “hide and seek” games are faced by anyone who wishes to research Jaina relic shrines. Publicly, the members of the Jaina community are in collective “denial” about the widespread practice of relic veneration,<sup>56</sup> and it is only due to favorable circumstances if this dimension of the Jaina “cultural unconscious” can occasionally be unveiled.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Laidlaw 1995:76, 80 reported similar “resistance and reluctance” and “uncensorious censure” of his respondents when faced with questions on miracles and magical powers associated with *dādāguru* shrines.

<sup>57</sup> On the usefulness of Assmann's 2000/2006 notion of the “cultural unconscious” for Jaina Studies, see Flügel 2008b:183.



Figure 9. Sādhvī Suvratā Śrī blesses the ground during the *śilānyāsa* ceremony 1 January 1987, Vallabha Smāraka Photo Album.

What is the evidence? In confidence, but not without pride, interviewees at the Vallabha Smāraka, and similar sites, generally admit after probing that some of the charred bones and ashes of great saints are usually preserved underneath *samādhis* constructed over their sites of cremation;<sup>58</sup> though common monks and generally no nuns are graced with this honor. Their *puṣpas* or flowers, that is, the small pieces of charred bone that remain after a cremation, are simply discarded. There is no conventional architectural style for these sites, apart from the traditional *cabūtarās* and *chatrīs*, and a wide variety of forms and shapes are evident today.

<sup>58</sup>) Many recent *samādhis* for Tapā Gaccha mendicants such as Prem Sūri (Khambhāt), Nemi Sūri (Mahwa/Bhāvnagar), Rāmacandra Sūri, Bhuvanabhanu Sūri, Meruprabha Sūri (Ahmedabad), Devacandra, Siddhi Sūri, Magha Vijaya, Udayavallabha, etc. are unexceptional in this respect as well, as the present writer learned from interviews with eyewitnesses.



Figure 10. Mortal remains of Mṛgāvatī are being immersed into the river Ganges in Haridvār in 1986, Vallabha Smāraka Photo Album.

After her death, Mṛgāvatī's corpse was displayed for two days to allow for *darśana*, one day longer than usual at these occasions. Representatives of the president of India came and garlanded her. One day after the cremation, most of the charred bones were collected and transported to Haridvār to be immersed into the river Gaṅgā (Fig. 10). A “handful” of bones and ashes were preserved by leading members<sup>59</sup> of the Vallabha Smāraka trust from Delhi.<sup>60</sup> After the brick platform,

<sup>59</sup>) Reportedly by Rāj Kumār Jain, Lālā Rāmlāl (deceased), Śāntilāl Jain, Ratancand Jain, and others. Usually, many bystanders take samples of ashes and bones from the funeral pyres of famous monks and nuns for private use. The ashes are believed to be increasers of finance, health, etc. They are kept in purses and dissolved in water and consumed as medicine for instance.

<sup>60</sup>) This is not unusual. Matsuoka 2009:3 reports the following events on the day after the cremation on 14 November at Śaṅkeśvara Pārśvanātha of Muni Jambū Vijaya (1922–2009) and Muni Namaskāra Vijaya, who tragically died in an accident near Balotara on 9 November 2009: “Their bones were collected in small cans. Jambuvijayaji's ashes were divided into hundreds of packages as gifts for the condolers.” The Times of India reported on 13 November 2009 that “An anonymous donor has offered Rs 1.11 crore for construction of a temple in the memory of the two monks.”

*maṃca*, for the cremation was taken down, the site grew over with grass until the beginning of the *samādhi* construction. The three remaining *sādhvīs* of Mṛgāvatī's group were all present at the ceremonies connected with the construction of the foundations and the relic chamber. Some kind of pathway was laid out with bricks and wooden boards to enable the nuns to directly witness the earth breaking ceremony, the *bhūmi pūja* or *khanana pūjā*, while avoiding walking over grass, which involves the killing of living beings. At the beginning, a square was marked on the grass with short wooden pegs and white chalk. Then Sādhvī Suvratā Śrī stepped onto a plank that was placed in the middle of the square and blessed the earth with *vāsakṣepa* powder. Afterwards, the *pūjā* was performed by leading committee members with fire, *dīpaka pūjā*, etc., before the ceremonial breaking of the earth with a spade commenced. Later the *śilānyāsa* ceremony was performed at the bottom of the pit by *śrāvakas* and *śrāvikās* who sprinkled milky water on the ground and performed *pūjā* with flowers, coconuts, and fire, etc. Every brick was individually blessed through touch by the hand of Sādhvī Suvratā Śrī who stepped down into the pit herself. After the foundation stones were placed, one by one, a small relic chamber, *asthi kaṣa*, was constructed where the vessel with charred bones and ashes would be entombed. The ritual acts of breaking the earth and placing the first bricks were previously auctioned to raise money for the building work.

On request, V. N. Dalal produced a drawing of the relic chamber (Fig. 11). It was constructed at the bottom of the trench which was later filled up to ground level with stone slabs set on a three-foot-deep foundation of three layers of reinforced concrete divided by two layers of sand, each six inches deep. The relic vessel, *asthi kalaśa*, was enshrined in the relic chamber, which is six feet deep, layered with bricks, and later covered with concrete on top of the foundation stone. The *kalaśa* itself is made of copper and apparently only one finger high. It is said to contain a very small amount of bones and ashes, since most of the remains had been taken away by individual devotees after the cremation or immersed in rivers in Northern India and Gujarāt. One interviewee, R. K. Jain laconically remarked: "My wife had a little — she is no more," "Sudarśanā has some." After the *kalaśa* was ceremonially entombed, the chamber was covered with a stone slab and cement. According to informants, there is no physical link

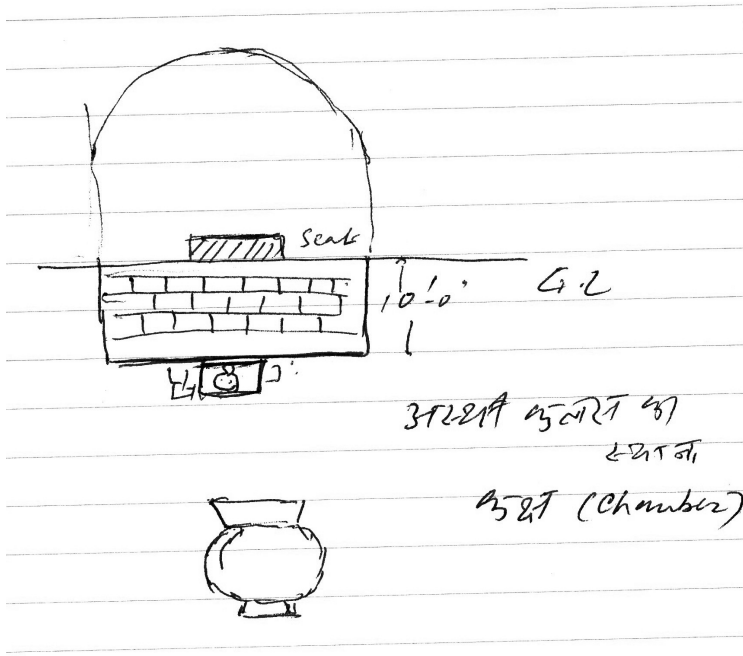


Figure 11. Drawing of the relic chamber of the Mrgāvati Samādhi by V. N. Dalal, Vallabha Smāraka 17.12.2003.

between the *kalāṣa* and the statue of Mrgāvati, except for a two-inch-wide and fifteen- to twenty-foot-long copper pipe, *nāla*, which is implanted in all Jaina and Hindu temples, connecting the foundation stone or navel, *nābhi*, with the seat on which the main statue is placed. The tube does not reach the surface, but extends only to the marble plate, *siddha śilā*, covering the foundations, on which the statue is placed (Fig. 12). The pipe was filled with precious stones, gold and silver coins, donated by eager devotees who queued up for this privilege, in the belief that this offering would produce ample returns.<sup>61, 62</sup>

<sup>61)</sup> In December 2009, the author had the opportunity to insert a few coins into a similar tube in a Sthānakavāsī *smāraka* for Ācārya Ātmārāma (1882–1962) which is under construction outside Ludhiyānā.

<sup>62)</sup> See Kramrisch 1946:110–12 on textual blueprints for the construction of the foundations of a Hindu temple, *śilā-nyāsa* and *iṣṭakā-nyāsa*, which are only slightly modified in Jaina building projects. On the foundation stone, *ādhāra-śilā*, or brick,



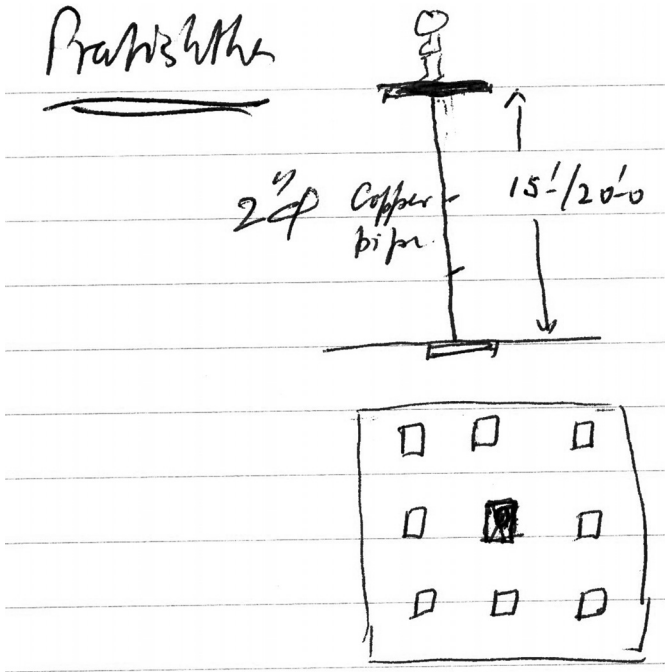


Figure 12. Drawing of the copper tube connecting the relic chamber with the statue of Sādhvī Mrgāvati by V. N. Dalal, Vallabha Smāraka 17.12.2003.

The *samādhi mandira* itself was designed and constructed by the firm C. P. Trivedi & Sons in Ahmedabad, which specializes in (Jaina) temple architecture. It was built without using any steel. Two reasons are cited for this: (a) Iron and steel should not be used in Jaina buildings, because metals are considered to be living matter and using them causes “*pāpa*,” according to the monks who were consulted. (b) Steel lasts only two to three hundred years. A temple should last a minimum

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-*iṣṭakā*, a treasure jar, *nidhi-kalaśa*, full of power, *śakti*, is placed in a small chamber, *garbha* or *kakṣa* in current Jaina idiom, which is covered with a stone slab and connected with a tube, *yoga-nāla*, to the plinth supporting the central altar. In addition to the *nidhi-kalaśa*, a *garbha-kalaśa*, containing the “seeds” of the temple (earth, jewels and grains), is placed on a representation of the serpent Ananta. Kramrisch sees a continuity between the Vedic sacrificial altar, *citi*, the (Buddhist) *stūpa*, and the Hindu temple “which is a monument more than a building” (ibid.:147f.). Jaina relic vessels apparently substitute for the *nidhi*- and/or *garbha-kalaśa*.

of one thousand years. If metal needs to be used at all, then only copper should be used, because it does not rust. A second “*samādhi*” for Mṛgāvātī is reportedly under construction at Ambālā.<sup>63</sup>

### Further Samādhis of the Vallabha Samudāya

Though the Mṛgāvātī Samādhi is one of the first if not *the* first grand scale funerary moment for a Jaina nun, it is not the first *samādhi* of the Vallabha Samudāya. It is one in a long line of commemorative shrines bearing witness to the perpetual glory of the religious reform movement of Ācārya Vijaya Ānanda Sūri (1836–1896), the teacher of Vijaya Vallabha Sūri and other influential monks, known as Muni Ātmārāma before his acrimonious conversion from the Sthānakavāsī Nāthūrām Jīvrāj Sampradāya to the Mūrtipūjaka Tapā Gaccha Vijaya Śākhā tradition. Vijaya Ānanda Sūri was born in the Pañjāb. After his re-initiation in the Tapā Gaccha he almost singlehandedly revitalized the image-worshipping Śvetāmbara tradition in Gujarāt and in his native Pañjāb where in the nineteenth century anti-iconic Jaina traditions and neo-Hindu movements such as the Āryā Samāj dominated. After his death, an opulent funerary monument, the Vijayānandasūri Samādhi Mandira, was consecrated on 6 May 1908 (1965 Vaiśākha Śukla 6) at the site of his cremation in Gujarāmvalā, near Lahore. In some publications, this shrine is designated as a “*stūpa*.” Subsequently, at least four further commemorative monuments, *samādhis*, *smārakas*, or *guru mandiras*, were erected in the Pañjāb alone: in Hoṣiyārpur (*pratiṣṭhā*: 6.5.1943), Jirā (24.6.1943), Jaṃḍiyālā Guru (29.4.1955), and Amṛtsar, not to mention numerous portrait statues all over India. Many of these were inaugurated at the suggestion of his most illustrious *pra-śiṣya*, Vijaya Vallabha Sūri, who became the founding father of one of several now independent lineages descending from Vijaya Ānanda Sūri.<sup>64</sup> In this way, his followers sought to permanently

<sup>63</sup>) Interview with Ācārya Virendra Sūri and Muni Rajendra Vijaya, Vallabha Smāraka, 17.12.2003.

<sup>64</sup>) Mendicants of the Vallabha Samudāya share food only with mendicants of the Keśarasūri and Dharmasūri Samudāyas. See Flügel 2006:372, n. 57.

inscribe the traces of Vijaya Ānanda Sūri's life and legacy into the landscape of India.<sup>65</sup>

After the death of Ācārya Vijaya Vallabha Sūri in Mumbāi, his followers sought to preserve the memory of his exemplary life and the channels to his “miraculous powers”<sup>66</sup> in similar ways.<sup>67</sup> The construction of his *samādhi* in Mumbāi, which was consecrated in 1955 (2011 Jyēṣṭha Śukla 12),<sup>68</sup> was reportedly inspired by Sādhvī Mṛgāvatī, with the blessings of Ācārya Samudra Sūri (N. N. 2003:7). According to anecdotal reports, some of his mortal remains were buried underneath this shrine, while the rest were carried away by devotees from all over India, amongst them trustees of his future memorial shrines in North India. In Mumbāi, his *mūrti* and *pādukās* are worshipped almost like a Jina statue, not with a formal *aṣṭaparakāri pūjā*, but with incense, *dhūpa*, fire, *dīpaka*, rice, *cāvala*, sandalwood, *kesara*, and with water, *jala*, which is placed with one finger of the right hand on the front, eyes and navel of his statue, as well as with song (even “Om Rām,” etc.).<sup>69</sup> Local gatekeepers prevent the taking of photographs and the writing of notes, which indicates a sense of unease about the unorthodox practices that are performed at this site, usually for ulterior instrumental purposes. Three memorials for Vijaya Vallabha Sūri in North India were apparently inspired by Mṛgāvatī: the Vallabha Vihāra Samādhi Mandira in Ambālā, the Vallabha Smāraka near Delhi, and the Guru Vallabha Samādhi Mandira in Māler Kotlā (N. N. 2003:7f.). Numerous portrait statues of him have been consecrated and are worshipped, for instance in the Jālandhar Jaina Mandira and in Kāngarā. Whether

<sup>65</sup> See the list of four *samādhis* of Vijaya Ānanda Sūri in Samudra Sūri 1956:432 and the photo of his oldest “*stūpa*” at the place of his cremation in the unpaginated opening pages of Vijaya Vallabha Sūri 1956. A description of the construction of the *samādhi* and instructions for proper silent veneration are given by Vijaya Vallabha Sūri (ibid.:414f.) Statues and *caraṇa pādukās* of Vijaya Ānanda Sūri were consecrated at numerous places, for instance in Paṭṭī in the year 1898 and in Hoṣiyārpur in 1899.

<sup>66</sup> The funeral procession attracted more than 200,000 participants and onlookers, and at the time was one of the greatest religious assemblies Bombay had ever seen.

<sup>67</sup> On his miracles, see Duggar 1989:473f.; Jaya Ānanda Vijaya 1989:19f.; Shimizu 2006:63. For further biographical literature on Vijaya Vallabha Sūri, see Shimizu 2006.

<sup>68</sup> Next to Seth Motiśāh Jaina Mandira, 137 Love Lane, Baikala, near Mumbāi Zoo.

<sup>69</sup> Visit 26.10.2003.

or not bone relics and ashes of Vijaya Vallabha Sūri are actually entombed in any of the sites (as the use of the term *samādhi* would suggest), the ongoing sectarian discourse on his miraculous powers invariably involves references to his ashes being moved around to be deposited in one or other new memorial. An informant from Delhi, for instance, suggested that a person who now lives in Ludhiyānā took some of Vijaya Vallabha Sūri's ashes and placed it into a temple there. The same happened in Delhi.

If the evidence on Vijaya Vallabha Sūri's relics is merely anecdotal and based on second hand reports, there is unequivocal first hand information on the fate of the relics of Ācārya Vijaya Indradinna Sūri (1923–2002),<sup>70</sup> the successor of Ācārya Vijaya Samudra Sūri (1891–1977),<sup>71</sup> whose own Samādhi Mandira was constructed at Mṛgāvatī's suggestion and consecrated on 1 November 1996 in Murādābād (N. N. 2003:8). Vijaya Indradinna Sūri's *samādhi* is located in Ambālā,<sup>72</sup> where he was cremated in a euphoric frenzy, as indicated by photographs (Fig. 13) and eyewitness reports by Ācārya Virendra Sūri and Muni Rajendra Vijaya.

The belief in his miraculous powers is still widespread. Evidently, the leaders of the Vallabha Samudāya put a premium on the existence of this particular quality in all of their *ācāryas* in order to maintain popular appeal. Official publications, on the other hand, emphasize universally acceptable qualities, such as support for public education, health and nation building.<sup>73</sup> After Indradinna Sūri's death, as usual, many miraculous events were reported. Due to their belief in his extraordinary powers, his devotees placed *vāsakṣepa*, gold, silver and precious stones on his dress and on the funeral palanquin before he was cremated, for purification and strength (Fig. 14).

<sup>70</sup> Born 1980 Kārtika Kṛṣṇa 9 (2.12.1923) Sālpurā (Vadoḍārā), *dikṣā* 1998 Phālguna Śukla 5 (20.2.1942), *ācārya* 2027 Māgha Śukla 5 (31.1.1971) Varlī, death 16.1.2002, Ambālā (after a bypass operation in 2001).

<sup>71</sup> Born 1948 Mārgaśīrṣa Śukla 11 (12.12.1891) Pālī, *dikṣā* 1967 Phālguna Kṛṣṇa 6 Sūrat, *ācārya* 2009 Māgha Śukla 5 (20.1.1953) Thānā (Bombay), death 2034 Jyēṣṭha Kṛṣṇa 8 (9.6.1977) Murādābād.

<sup>72</sup> Vijaya Indra Samādhi, Caḍīgaṛh Highway, Motor Market, Ambālā City.

<sup>73</sup> With regard to Vijaya Vallabha Sūri, see for instance MJV 1956.



Figure 13. Ācārya Vijaya Indradinna Sūri's funeral procession in Ambālā January 2002, Vallabha Smāraka Photo Album.

The winner of the bidding competition spent RS 63 Lakhs for the privilege of performing the kindling of the fire, *agni saṃskāra*, which for Jaina mendicants is not, as in secular funerals, routinely conducted by the oldest son. “While the flames were in progress,” Muni Rajendra Vijaya reported, “Mahārāj jī appeared as the image of Pārśvanāth Bhagavān in sitting posture. Thereafter he appeared in the form of Māñibhadrajī — the deity *guruji* had pleased by his *sāadhanā*.” Because of this apparition, fire sacrifices were performed in the presence of a monk in a *havana-kunḍa* to Māñibhadra, the protector of the Tapā Gaccha and wish-fulfilling *kula-devatā* of the Vallabha Samudāya<sup>74</sup> (Fig. 15).

<sup>74</sup> According to Cort 1997:115, Māñibhadra, the protector, *adhiṣṭhāyaka*, of the Tapā Gaccha, is regarded as “the reincarnation of a sixteenth-century Jain layman named Māñakandra who had defended image-worship against the iconoclastic followers of Loṅkā Śāh.” The famed “defeat” of the enemies of image-worship in the Pañjāb by Vijaya Ānanda Sūri resonates well with this story and may explain the



*Figure 14.* Ācārya Vijaya Indradinna Sūri before his cremation in Ambālā January 2002, Vallabha Smāraka Photo Album.



*Figure 15.* Fire sacrifice to Māṇibhadra, the protective and wish-fulfilling lineage deity of the Vallabha Samudāya in Ambālā January 2002, Vallabha Smāraka Photo Album.

Indradinna Sūri's successor, Gacchādhipati Ācārya Ratnakāra Sūri (born 1945), continues his predecessor's support for *samādhi* construction. In the Pañjāb, he faces strong local competition by the *gaṇas* of the anti-iconic Sthānakavāsī Śramaṇasaṅgha, which nowadays also engage in *stūpa* construction in the competitive sectarian quest for popular support (Flügel 2008a, 2010b). On his command, the charred bones and ashes of Vijaya Indradinna Sūri were collected and divided into several portions. One part was preserved locally to be entombed under a newly constructed *samādhi mandira*,<sup>75</sup> while most of the remainder was shared between different parties to be dispersed in thirty-six rivers all over India. The decision to discard, *visarjana*, the mortal remains not only in one but in many rivers must be read as a hegemonic attempt by Ācārya Ratnakāra Sūri to encompass as many of his predecessors' regional support networks as possible (cf. Geary 1986:181f.). The practice to divide relics in order to create more than one relic shrine is not uncommon, nor is the transportation of corpses to preferred cremation sites.<sup>76</sup> Two of the main sites were the river Narmada and the river Bodeli near Vaḍodarā in Gujarāt, where many followers and disciples of the deceased live (Fig. 16).

Indradinna Sūri was born into a family of Parnārs in Gujarāt, a Dalit caste whose members categorize themselves as *ksatriyas* and traditionally eat meat. His father Muni Gautama Vijaya was also a Jain monk. He worked in the cotton business and became a Jain and later a monk after being converted by the *śrāvaka* Somcandbhāi Śāh. At the time of his own initiation, Indradinna Sūri took a vow to convert as many Parnārs as possible, and because of his example many Parnārs

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popularity of Māñibhadra amongst the followers of Vallabha Samudāya. Maybe sub-sectarian rivalry informs the recent rise of the protector gods Ghaṇṭākārṇa Mahāvīra and Nākoṛā Bhairava amongst the followers of other Tapā Gacch orders in Gujarāt and Rājasthān. Cf. Cort 2001:222, n. 40.

<sup>75</sup> P. Bhogilal, interviewed Mumbai 26.10.2003, pointed out that a *samādhi* for Indradinna Sūri will be constructed in the Pañjāb with his bones and ashes buried inside. He suspected that a leading trustee from Delhi even took some of the "dust" from Vijaya Vallabha Sūri's pyre to Delhi. At the same time, he was convinced that Mrgāvati's *samādhi* at the Vallabha Smāraka, which he co-sponsored, does not contain any of her remains.

<sup>76</sup> See footnote 4 for two examples of the former and footnote 59 for an example of the latter.



Figure 16. Mortal remains of Ācārya Vijaya Indradinna Sūri before their immersion into the river Bodeli in Gujarat in January 2002, Vallabha Smāraka Photo Album.

became Jainas. Today about 50% of all mendicants of the Vallabha Samudāya and 25% of the monks (about 50 of altogether 200 in all Mūrtipūjaka *gacchas*) are Parnārs.<sup>77</sup> “We are egalitarian, we accept anyone,” Ācārya Virendra Sūri stressed, during an interview with the present author, before proudly presenting a piece of bone and a metal box filled with ashes from Indradinna Sūri’s funeral pyre<sup>78</sup> (Fig. 17) (at this very moment a delegation of fellow Parnārs from Gujarāt arrived, all of whom had fasted without water for the whole day).

The strong presence of members of a previously meat-eating “untouchable” caste creates considerable problems for the social integration of the mendicants and laity of the sub-sect: the majority of the lay followers in Gujarāt and in the Pañjāb are from the Osvāl and

<sup>77</sup> In 2002, when he was inaugurated, this group had 295 mendicants, 60 *sādhus* and 235 *sādhvīs* (B. U. Jain 2002:232). In 2008, the Vallabha Samudāya split into two groups led by Ācārya Vijaya Ratnakāra Sūri (Bhāg I) and Ācārya Vijaya Nityānanda (Bhāg II) respectively (B.U. Jain 2009: 225–7, 235–7).

<sup>78</sup> Many Jaina mendicants carry small bone relics and ashes of other mendicants with them.





Figure 17. Ācārya Virendra Sūri shows a bone relic of Vijaya Indradinna Sūri, photo by the author, Vallabha Smāraka Annexe 18.12.2003.

Śrīmālī merchant castes from which most followers of the Śvetāmbara tradition are traditionally recruited.<sup>79</sup> Many members of the traditionally vegetarian middle caste and middle class laity still do not engage in social intercourse with the relatively recently recruited low caste and tribal converts, even if they bow to monks and nuns from Parnār families, in the absence of renouncers from their own castes. Similar

<sup>79</sup>) “The majority of Pañjābī members of the Vallabha Samudāya are from the Osvāla caste, however, some are from the Khaṇḍelavāla caste (ex. Panyās Jaya Vijaya Jī), and Brahmin caste (ex. Ācārya Vijaya Kamala Sūri). Vijaya Vallabha Sūri’s female disciple Sādhvī Mṛgavatī Jī was from Dasa Śrīmālī caste, in Gujarātz, while on the other hand, her disciples are from the (Viśa) Osvālas, while the origin of many *sādhvis* is Pañjābī” (Shimizu 2006:66).

complications are faced by the Jain mendicants in the Pañjāb from Brahmin families. Even Gujarāti and Punjābī Osvāls generally do not socialize because of linguistic and cultural differences such as the onion and garlic eating habits of the North Indian Osvāls, which to some degree explains why the *khādī*-wearing Vijaya Vallabha Sūri supported national integration and Hindī as the lingua franca of India.<sup>80</sup> Unsurprisingly, a dispute, whose causes are not entirely clear, emerged soon after the cremation of Indradinna Sūri amongst his followers. The presence of some of his bones and ashes that were kept in the small town of Bodeli provoked local clashes in the year 2001 “as long as they were there,” according to Muni Virendra Vijaya. In January 2003, the relics were therefore transported to the town of Vāghā near Amṛtsar in the Pañjāb, the main border crossing to Pakistan, where at eight p.m. in the night yet another miracle occurred. Light flashed from the vehicles and illuminated three roads before dispersing in the sky. Ācārya Virendra Sūri explained that Mahāvīra’s ashes were taken by the gods to the heavens both for his remembrance and for their miraculous effects. Similarly, ashes of renowned saints such as Indradinna Sūri are used by monks both as souvenirs and for the purification of water that is sprayed over crowds as a blessing and for protection. They are also used as medicine and in attempts to revive the dead.

### Objections to Relic Worship

Despite the fact that there is no explicit condemnation of either relic worship or image worship in the canonical scriptures of the Jainas (cf. Shah 1987:7), there is unequivocal rejection of the worship of mere physical entities, whether for material or spiritual benefits. Except for body secretions and mortal remains of ascetics, this aversion, *viigīnchā* / *vitigicchā* (S. *vicikitsā*),<sup>81</sup> is extended to all physical remains of living beings, such as excrement, hair, bones, nails or teeth, which have to be removed, for instance, when the site for a temple construc-

<sup>80</sup>) See Cort 2001:51 on protests in Pāṭaṇ against his involvement in Gāndhī’s independence movement and propagation of social reform, i.e., his direct involvement in politics.

<sup>81</sup>) On this term, see Dundas 1985:190, n. 63.

tion or image installation is cleared (Glasenapp 1925:430f./1999:473). Texts such as TŚPC 1.843–855 emphasize that the bodies and body parts of living Jaina ascetics are a special class of objects, endowed with healing properties and other miraculous powers. But the preservation of bone relics and the construction of relic shrines are generally dismissed. The tenth-century Digambara *ācārya* Somadeva, for instance, in his Yaśastilaka Ch. VIII, explicitly rejects *stūpa* worship as “stupid,” *mūḍha* (Handiqui 1949/1968:253), though Chapter VI.17–18 of the same book reiterates the conventional portrayal of the Jaina *stūpa* of Mathurā as “built by the gods” (ibid.:416, 432–34), a phrase that seems to convey significance to the famous building while at the same time diverting responsibility for its construction away from human beings to the (relic-worshipping) gods.<sup>82</sup>

While the preservation of relics underneath funeral cenotaphs remains a clandestine if widespread practice in contemporary Mūrtipūjaka and Digambara traditions, in certain branches of the Sthānakavāsī tradition several recently constructed memorials openly advertise the presence of bone relics and display relic vessels publicly above ground. This provoked a lively debate within the tradition. Despite their original ideological “reservations about the worship of Stūpas and Caityas” (Roth 1989:148), the construction of *samādhis* or *pāvana-dhāmas*, purifying holy abodes, that is, pilgrimage places, has become popular amongst unorthodox Sthānakavāsī traditions, most prominently among the sub-groups, or *gaṇas*, of the Śramaṇasaṅgha, which strive to retain or strengthen their identity in the face of the long expected collapse of the fragile administrative structure of the Śramaṇasaṅgha, an umbrella organization founded in 1952 by thirty-two originally independent monastic traditions, *sampradāyas*, now led by one single *ācārya* (Flügel 2003:196).<sup>83</sup> The majority of the relic

<sup>82</sup>) This interpretation is, at least, a possibility. Bühler 1891:61f. took the expression as a token of ancientness: “*devanirmīta*, ‘built by the gods,’ i.e., so ancient that at the time, when the inscription was incised, its origin had been forgotten.” Lüders later changed Bühler’s reading of the inscription *pratimā vodve thupe devanirmite* into *pratimāvo dve thupa devanirmite*. See Shah 1987:15f.

<sup>83</sup>) Cf. Geary 1986:179 on the ability of relics to “substitute for public authority” during periods of “relatively weak central government.” See also Tambiah 1984:344–6.

*stūpas* for prominent monks of the Śramaṇasaṅgha are associated with the *gaṇas* of the North Indian Pañjāb Lavajīrṣi, Amarasiṅha Jīvarāja, Nāthūrāma Jīvarāja and Raghunātha Dharmadāsa traditions which face intense competition from the monastic orders of the Mūrtipūjaka tradition such as the Vallabha Samudāya which are active in the Hindī speaking areas of Northern India. Since the time of Vijaya Ānanda Sūri's secession from the Sthānakavāsī tradition, the focus of this sectarian competition is the Pañjāb.

Objections to relic worship are occasionally raised internally, but rarely published. In an interview with the present writer in Ratlām 28 December 2002, the orthodox Pravartaka Umeśmuni (born 1932) of the Mālvā Dharmadāsa Gaṇa within the Śramaṇasaṅgha summarized the arguments of orthodox Sthānakavāsīs against the construction of (relic) *stūpas*.<sup>84</sup> When asked if the construction of *samādhis* or *pāvana-dhāmas* is a new development in the Sthānakavāsī (Jaina) tradition, he answered that those who think that erecting such buildings is a work of religion, *dharma-kārya*, and a form of *guru-bhakti* are mistaken. They are ignorant, *ajñāna*, and deluded, *moha*, since the Sthānakavāsīs follow the Āgamas, where nothing is written about Jaina pilgrimage places, *tīrtha*,<sup>85</sup> or erecting *stūpas* (except those made by the gods). Memorials are the root cause of image worship, and hence damaging. One cannot stop it, because no one is listening in this age. The majority are materialistic and not concerned with the fruits of religion. These places increase in great numbers to satisfy worldly desires without consideration of religious merit, *puṇya*.<sup>86</sup> It is true that the Namaskāra Mantra, the paradigmatic Jaina prayer, can also be recited for the mere fulfillment of worldly desires, *laukika kāmanā*, and for

<sup>84</sup> After an internal dispute within the Śramaṇasaṅgha, Umeśmuni was pronounced *ācārya* by his supporters in protest against the “lax” Ācārya Dr Śivmuni, who is still the official head of the Śramaṇasaṅgha. Although he is not using the title himself, Umeśmuni does not object to this designation either. See Flügel 2003:215–8.

<sup>85</sup> *Sthānakavāsī paramparāeṃ āgam ke pramāṇ se aise tīrtha-sthāpanā ko na to tīrtha mānatī haiṃ aur na aise tīrtha-sthāpanā ko mahatva detī haiṃ* (Umeśmuni 2007:11).

<sup>86</sup> Umeśmuni 2007:11f. On 22 February 1998 in Ratlām, a vast *samādhi* was inaugurated for one of Umeśmuni's teachers, “Mālav Kesari” Saubhāgyamal (1897–1984). Near the *samādhi* his *baikuṇṭhi* is exhibited, which was apparently not burnt on the pyre, including one half-burnt piece of cloth. On Saubhāgyamal, see Flügel 2007:129.

the acquisition of powers, *siddhi*. But, for instance, the consecration and veneration of so-called *navakāra*- or *tīrtha kalāśas*, that is, coconut shaped metal vessels venerated for wellbeing by some Sthānakavāsīs at home or collectively under the direction of mendicants with recitations of the Namaskāra Mantra, is a dangerous form of venerating lifeless objects, *jaṛ pūjā*,<sup>87</sup> which does not belong to the *mokṣa mārga* but to the *saṃsāra mārga*.<sup>88</sup> It is important to avoid a mixture of the two which only leads to *oja* (S. *ojas*), splendor, and *teja* (S. *tejas*), fiery energy, but not to liberation. Hence, the true Sthānakavāsī is not concerned with tradition, *paramparā*, but pursues only the path of the purification of the soul in agreement with the scriptures, *āgamānumodit ātma-viśuddhi kā mārga* (Umeśmuni 2007:13).

The customary rules, *māryādās*, of many orthodox independent Sthānakavāsī traditions explicitly reject the construction and veneration of *samādhis*, together with the worship of lifeless objects, such as material images in general. An example is Resolution No. 32 ratified by six still independent Gujarātī Sthānakavāsī-traditions (Ajṛāmar, Gopāl, Goṇḍal, Boṭād, Sāyalā, Dariyāpurī) at a *sammelan* in Rājkoṭ 1–7 March 1932 (1988 Māgha Kṛṣṇa 9–15).<sup>89</sup> A yet unattributable Sthānakavāsī *sāmācārī*, or list of sectarian customary monastic rules, published in Mālvā under the name Jaina Bhikṣu Gabbūlāl (1949:13) explicitly prohibits the erection of death memorials.<sup>90</sup> Similar rules were laid down by Ācārya Gaṇeśīlāl (1890–1963) of the Sādhumārgī tradition in Rājasthān, who left the Śramaṇasaṅgha in 1962 to re-establish the Sādhumārgīs as an independent orthodox order.<sup>91</sup> So do the

<sup>87</sup>) Umeśmuni 2007:13.

<sup>88</sup>) For a general rejection of such arguments from a Digambara perspective, see CB 202, in Jaini 2008:124.

<sup>89</sup>) Resolution No. 32: *sādhū-sādhvī ke photo khiñcvānā, unahem pustakoṃ mem cahpānā yā grhastha ke ghar par darśan pūjan ke lie rakhanā, samādhi-sthān banānā, pāt par rupae rakhanā, pāt ko praṇām karānā ādi jaṛ-pūjā, ham logoṃ ke paramparā ke viruddha hai* (AISJC 1956:150).

<sup>90</sup>) Rule 19j: *sādhū sādhvī ke mṛtyu bād unkā koī jaṛ-smārak nahīm karānā aur upadeśādik abhiprāy batākar karvānā nahīm, bane vahā tak bajandār śiṣṭa bhāṣā mem niṣedh karnā...* (Gabbūlāl 1949:13).

<sup>91</sup>) *Guru ādi kī samādhi pagaliye va inake citroṃ ko dhūp dip va namaskār svayaṃ na kareṃ dusareṃ seṃ na karāveṃ* (Gaṇeśmāl n.d.). *Vidyālay, skūl, gurukūl, pustakālay, maṇḍal sthānak ādi ke lie makān banāne kā upadeś nahī denā* (ibid.).

rules and regulations of a lay organization associated with the orthodox Sthānakavāsī Jñānagaccha, the Akhila Bhāratiya Śrī Sādhumārgī Jaina Saṃskṛti Rakṣaka Saṅgha, which was formed in 1957 in protest against a range of practices within the Sthānakavāsī Śramaṇasaṅgha such as *stūpa* construction that were “opposed to the scriptures.”<sup>92</sup> The contemporary Sthānakavāsī writer S. L. Sañcetī (1999:40f.), and others, protest not only against the construction of *stūpas*, but also object to the practice of setting up photographs at the cremation sites of well known monks, inviting devotees to bow to the photos and to place incense sticks in front of them. His grievance echoes a complaint of Ācārya Hirācandra (born 1938), the successor of Ācārya Hastimal (1911–1991) as leader of the orthodox Sthānakavāsī Ratnavamśa, who highlighted the paradoxical fact that a funeral memorial was erected for the second leader of the Śramaṇasaṅgha, Ācārya Ānanda Rṣi (1900–1992), although Ānanda Rṣi himself objected to the widespread practice of erecting funeral memorials for prominent monks of the Śramaṇasaṅgha.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Section “k” entitled *śraddhā viṣayak* states clearly that “pilgrimages to rivers, mountains and *stūpas* or fixed sacred sites” are not in accordance with (Sthānakavāsī Jaina) religious belief: *vah vyakti vitarāṅ sarvajña, sarvadarśi arihant siddha bhagavān ko hī devādhidev mānane vālā ho | rāgi, dveṣi, asarvajña athavā jaṛ-mūrti va citra ko dharma dev nahim mānane vālā ho, tathā nadi pahār athavā stūp yā sthāvar tīrthom kī yātrā meṃ dharma śraddha ne vālā na ho |* (ABSJSRS 1957:32f.).

<sup>93</sup> Hirācandra 2003:20f. refers to the report of Ānanda Rṣi 1972/1999:49. When Ānanda Rṣi’s was twenty-seven years old his guru Ratana Rṣi died near Alipur and the question arouse how to commemorate him. A local illiterate, *an-parh*, landlord, *māl-guzār*, proposed and finally built a *samādhi* at the cremation site opposite the Viṭṭhala Mandira, despite the fact that Ānanda Rṣi did not want a memorial to be constructed. During his Kuśālapurā *cāturmāsa*, Ānanda Rṣi described the incident in one of his sermons and recalled his much cited response to the landlord: *hamāre yahām [sthānakavāsī samāj meṃ] samādhi nahim mānate* — here amongst us [in our Sthānakavāsī society] a funeral memorial is not accepted (ibid.). He thus officially rejected the worship of images and lifeless objects, *jaṛ pūjā*. Hirācand 2003:21 stresses that he himself is not saying everyone should give up *mūrtipūjā* and *jaṛ pūjā*, since memorials are obviously attractive for devotees, as long as internal worship, *bhāva pūjā*, oriented towards the qualities, *guṇa*, represented by the object is practiced rather than worship of the material object itself: *samādhi jaṛpūjā kī or ākarṣit kartī hai aur ham guṇom ke pujaṛi haiṃ. jaṛ pūjā hogī vahām bhāv pūjā aur bhāv-bhakti gaṇ ho jāyegī* (ibid.).

S. Sañcetī (1999:40f.), whose voice represents a strong current of opinion in the anti-iconic Jaina traditions, also objects to the customary Jaina spectacle of displaying on ice and venerating the corpses of prominent religious leaders before the cremation, also a common Buddhist practice (DN ii.16.6.13, cf. Bareau 1971:178). In his view, this is practiced mainly to assemble large numbers of devotees in order to raise money for the construction of memorials which later will become the headquarters of the mendicants of the respective order with all amenities, such as cantines, *bhojana-sālā*, lavatories, etc. Ultimately, picnics and marriages are held there and the places are misused for a variety of worldly purposes. The money is raised by auctioning the paraphernalia, *upakaraṇa*, of the deceased, “*muhapattī, oghā, puñjaṇī*,”<sup>94</sup> the privilege to shoulder the funeral palanquin, “*beṅkuṭī*” (*baikuṇṭhī*), to keep parts of its decoration, or the privilege of kindling the fire. Reminding everyone that living, *sacitta*, water (ice) and fire should not be used by devout Jains, he also protests against the practice of cremation itself, which inevitably destroys innumerable organisms inhabiting the corpse. This issue was already discussed in antiquity, since the use of the living element of fire is, in principle, off limits for fully committed Jains.<sup>95</sup> In practice, the violence against one-sensed living beings such as the elements earth, fire, water and air can only be systematically curtailed by Jaina mendicants, whose survival is indirectly reliant on acts of violence committed by others.

### Relic Worship and the Jaina Cultural Unconscious

Are contemporary Jaina practices of relic worship a new development or is there evidence for historical antecedents beyond the early nineteenth century?<sup>96</sup> The significance of the chance “discovery” of the contemporary Jaina cult of relic *stūpas* for the history of religions can only be properly assessed by comparing observed custom with textual

<sup>94</sup>) Letter of the author 25.6. 2003.

<sup>95</sup>) See Bollée 2002:54. Schopen 1992/1997:217 mentioned a debate in the Tibetan Buddhist Vinayakṣudrakavastu relating the “Buddha’s view” that the “worms” inside the living body die with him; corpses, however, should be opened up and examined before cremation to make sure no living creature will be injured by the fire.

<sup>96</sup>) See footnote 2 for earlier studies.

paradigms and with the archaeological and epigraphic evidence. Because the veneration of relics is not standard Jaina doctrinal practice, comprehensive textual models are not readily at hand. In the absence of archaeological evidence, it thus remains a matter of conjecture and logical-historical reconstruction to determine when and how currently observable monastic funerary customs emerged.

The widespread belief in the protective powers of relics and *stūpas* in ancient India is not only documented in Buddhist but also in Jaina scriptures. The fifth-century Nāṃdī (NS<sub>1</sub>) 38 (= NS<sub>2</sub> 53f.),<sup>97</sup> a late-canonical text, highlights the protective power of relics in the story of the conquest of the town of Khaggi (“sword”) in Videha by king Kūṇiya (Kūṇika) through the cunning reasoning of the evil Muni Kulabālaya (Kulabālaka). The main purpose of the story is to illustrate the misuse of deductive reasoning, *pariṇāmiyā buddhi*. Realizing that the protective powers of the unnamed *stūpa* at its center makes the town invulnerable, the ascetic entered the city in disguise to spread the idea that the aim of the king in attacking the city was only to destroy the *stūpa* and that he would leave as soon as this task was accomplished. Convinced of the ascetic’s arguments, the citizens demolished the protective *stūpa* themselves, and the city was subsequently conquered.

In a remarkably similar Buddhist tale, the motif of the cunning but evil ascetic is turned against the Jains. But the main purpose of the Buddhist story is not the exemplification of the abuse of deductive reasoning or the critique of the Jains or Niganthas but the demonstration of the power of the Buddha’s relics.<sup>98</sup> The thirteenth-century Pāli version of the Dāṭhāvaṃsa (DV) II–III composed by Dhammakitti describes the rivalry between followers of the Buddha and of the Niganthas or “heretics,” *titthiyā*, over the patronage of King Guhasīva of Kālīṅga in terms of their contrasting attitudes toward the worship of the tooth relics (of the Buddha). It relates how both Guhasīva and his overlord King Paṇḍu of Pāṭaliputta were, one after the other, converted from Jainism to Buddhism through a series of unprecedented miracles, *acchariyas*, caused by the Buddha’s tooth-relic, though only

<sup>97</sup>) The key word is *khaggi-thūbhimde* (S. *khadgī-stūpa-bhedah*).

<sup>98</sup>) On the relics of the Buddha in the Buddhist chronicles, see Trainor 1997:117ff., 164ff.



indirectly. In reality, it was the devotion of true believers, the majority of the common citizens “recollecting the qualities such as Dasabalas etc. of the excellent Buddha” (DV<sub>2</sub> II.114f.) that prompted the miracles. The remembrance of the Buddha’s qualities revealed to them the miraculous power, *mahi-iddhi*, magical power, *vijjā-bala*, and influence, *pabbhāva*, of the Buddha relic. Originally, Guhasīva was a follower of the Jains, *niganṭhas*, who are described as “cunning, enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, hankering after gain and fame and ignorant of the welfare of their own and of others.”<sup>99</sup> The description of the *niganṭhas*’ appeal to Paṇḍu to punish the convert Guhasīva for his heresy presents them as being both so clever and yet ignorant that they defend not their own belief in the Jinas but belief in the Hindu gods:<sup>100</sup>

You always salute gods, Śiva, Brahmā, etc., who are endowed with miraculous powers and who should be worshipped by all gods and men.<sup>101</sup>

Now, your subordinate king, Guhasīva, blaming such gods, worships the bone of the dead. (DV<sub>2</sub> II.93f.)<sup>102</sup>

When the Jains, acting on order of Paṇḍu, subsequently failed to burn the bone relic and to destroy it by any other means (DV III.10–18), they wondered how to explain the inexplicable power of the relic. Finally they invoked the Hindu *avatara* concept, arguing that the only explanation could be that the bone was part of the body of Janaddana (Viṣṇu), for how else could such miraculous material influence be possible (since Jinas and other liberated souls cannot interfere into this world) (DV<sub>2</sub> III.19).<sup>103</sup>

<sup>99</sup>) *Saparattthānabhiññeso lābhāsakkāralolupe | māyāvino abijjandhe niganthe samupattāhi* ||73|| (p. 13).

<sup>100</sup>) On strategic jainizing reinterpretations of Hindu religious terms, such as *śiva* (*mokṣa*), *mahādeva* (*jina*), in medieval Jaina texts, see Williams 1963/1983:xix.

<sup>101</sup>) *Sabbadevamanussehi vandaniye mahiddhike | sivabrahmādayo deve niccam tumhe namassatha* ||93||.

<sup>102</sup>) *Tuyham sāmāntabhūpālo guhasīvo paṇādhunā | nindanto tādisse deve chavaṭimṭha vandate iti* ||94|| (p. 14).

<sup>103</sup>) See Jaini 1993:244f. on the general Jaina rejection of the *avatara* concept and on the motif in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa “that Viṣṇu became incarnate as the Buddha through the power of his Yogamāyā in order to delude the demons,” which is similarly applied to the Jina Rṣabha in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. See also the story of Aśoka’s conversion

Buddhist literature abounds in attempts at warding off standard Jaina criticism of Buddhist relic worship. All the more astonishing is the occasional acknowledgment of the power of *stūpas* and miracles in Jaina canonical literature. The best examples are the legendary tales of the removal of the relics of the Jinas by gods and demigods for exclusive private worship in their own palaces in the first heaven and in the rather pleasant uppermost level of hell. Early Jaina Vinaya texts are unconcerned with the fate of the corpse of a (common) Jaina mendicant after its ceremonial disposal in the forest or elsewhere outside the abode.<sup>104</sup> The earliest textual paradigms that closely resemble currently observable practices of cremation and disposal of the remains are the mythical accounts of the funerals of selected Jinas in the proto-Purāṇas of the middle- and late-canonical period (ca. first century BCE to fifth century CE). The heavenly scenarios depicted in these texts probably reflected common practice, rather than the other way round, thus pointing to the historical continuity of Indian funeral practices, including *stūpa* construction, which in contemporary India is presently almost only practiced by Jainas and has thus become a typically Jaina custom. Having considered the passages in Rāyapaseṇaijja (Rāy<sub>1</sub>) 200g (= Rāy<sub>2</sub> 351) on the post-funerary veneration by the gods of the bone

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to Buddhism, after testing the virtues of members of various religious groups including *nigaṇṭhas*, and the erection of *stūpas* on behalf of the Buddha in Thūp<sub>1</sub>, pp. 185–190 (tr. pp. 49–55).

<sup>104</sup> Rudimentary rules for the disposal, *ujjhaṇa* (S. *ujjhana*), of the bodies of deceased ascetics can be found in the ancient Kappa (BKS) 4.24 and Vavahāra (VS<sub>1</sub>) 7.17 and in the commentaries on these almost identical passages: the sixth-century Bṛhat Kalpa Bhāṣya (BKB) 5.5497–5565 incorporating the ca. first-century CE Bṛhat Kalpa Niryukti (BKN), and the Vyavahāra Bhāṣya (VB) 3254–3308 (=7.424 ff.). Further details are given in Malayagiri's twelfth-century Vyavahāra Ṭikā (VṬ) and the Bṛhat Kalpa Sūtra Ṭikā (BKT) which was completed by Kṣemakīrti in 1276. For *niharana* (S. *nirharana*), removal of the corpse, see Niśītha Cūrṇi 11; for *pariṭṭhāvaṇiya* (S. *pariṭṭhāpanika*), abandonment of the dead, ĀvN 2.94–130 (pp. 71a–76) and ĀvC II (pp. 102–109). See J. C. Jain 1947:241f., 1988/1992:97–104; Deo 1956:428–32; Bollée 1998 II:xxiii–iv. The issue is also treated in the Bhagavatī Ārādhana (BhĀ) 1960 ff. of the c. first-century CE Digambara *ācārya* Śivārya or Śivakoṭi, starting with the Vijahaṇā (Vihāna) section, whose contents overlap with the BKB. See Upadhye 1974/1983:41ff.; Varni 1944/1998 IV:393f.; J. C. Jain 2004:114f.; Oerjens 1976. See Schopen 1992/1997:210 on almost identical “minimal” *nirharana* procedures in early Buddhism. See also footnote 176.

relics of the Jinas, *jīṇa-sakabhā*, placed in round jewelry-studded boxes hanging from memorial pillars, *ceiya-khaṁbha*,<sup>105</sup> and on the cremation of the first Jina Usabha (Rṣabha) and the removal and veneration of his remains in heaven by the gods in Jambuddivapannatti (JDP<sub>1</sub>) 2.43 (= JDP<sub>2</sub> 2.109–120), Jīvājīvābhigama (JĀĀ) 138 and Bhadrabāhu's Āvassaya Nijjutti (ĀvN<sub>1</sub>) 435,<sup>106</sup> all of which have been placed in the middle or late canonical period, Schubring (1935/2000 § 25: 49f.) concluded that they “most certainly followed earthly examples” and that “cremation... was the rule,” which is equally said “of the Tīrthaṅkaras” (ibid.:§ 165:290).<sup>107</sup> Given that Indras and Indrāṇīs, the model rulers whose roles are still enacted in Jain temple rituals today, are “Jainism’s model worshipers” (Babb 1996:77), if not “the exact counterparts of terrestrial prototypes” (Alsdorf 1966:19), the cliché of the removal of the bone relics by the gods could be interpreted as a metaphor for the exclusive access of Jaina laity to the relics, as opposed to other members of Indian society, such as Brahmins etc., who do not know how to venerate the relics properly, which would tally with current practice and with similar Buddhist accounts.<sup>108</sup> If Schubring is right, and the stories are not “pure mythology,” then the practice of cremating the discarded bodies of ascetics, and preserving relics, performed by householders (Jaina laity or the general public), was either introduced in the middle- or late-canonical period, or always existed side-by-side with the monastic custom of simply abandoning the corpse.

<sup>105</sup> Leumann 1885:500–4 highlighted that the description of the rite of worship indicates the precedence of *mūrtipūja*, image-worship, over *ceiya thūbha* worship.

<sup>106</sup> Balbir 1993:133 designates the heavenly *stūpas* depicted in the JDP as “monuments commémoratifs.”

<sup>107</sup> This view was echoed by Shah 1955/1998:59, n. 4, 1987:15 and Deo 1956:322, etc., *pace* Shah 1955/1998:53, who remarked on depictions of the worship of Jaina relics by the gods: “we must remember that this is a description of a shrine whose counterpart on earth is nowhere referred to in the Jaina canons.” According to Bruhn 1954:116, the description of relic worship in Jambuddivapannatti is “*reine Mythologie*” (pure mythology). The same assessment was given by Ācārya Mahāprajña, interviewed in Sujāṅgarh 21.12.2008. According to Bruhn 1985:164 the “*de facto* situation will... always deviate to a greater or lesser extent from the literary canon.”

<sup>108</sup> For Aśoka and Sakka as “exemplars of the lay Buddhist ideal,” see Trainor 1997:122, n. 91.

With the increased integration of householders in the monastic practices of disposal, as reflected in the Śvetāmbara Ācārya Malayagiri's twelfth-century Br̥hat Kalpa Sūtra Tīkā on BKB 5500–5565 (Schubring 1966:79f.), monastic procedures of discarding began to be officially supplemented by rites of cremation and procedures for disposing of relics that are exclusively performed by householders. There are only minor ritual differences between the cremation rituals for Jaina mendicants and laity. As a rule, funerals of mendicants are celebrated in a joyful rather than mournful manner, because mendicants are either reborn as gods in heaven or liberated from this world of suffering. Specific Jaina lay funerals, modeled on the Hindu *saṃskāras*, were not delineated in Jaina literature “before the fifteenth century” (Williams 1963/1983:xxiv). Even today, Jaina lay funerals tend to reflect local “Hindu” practices in a jainized way, without ever involving Brahmins and performing *śrāddha*, except for the funerals for those who performed the ritual fast to death, *saṃlekhanā*, which mimic the opulent and joyful ceremonies performed for mendicants,<sup>109</sup> in conscious reversal of common custom.<sup>110</sup> For centuries, householders who supported the *nigānṭhas* must have either disposed of their dead in the same manner as the mendicants or performed funeral rites, like other life-cycle rituals today, according to common (Vedic or Purāṇic) custom which was jainized to different degrees, and with permission of the *ācāryas* may have simply extended their own (high class) funeral practices to the discarded corpses of the mendicants.

One reason why rites of cremation for Jaina mendicants, i.e., the jainized Vedic practices observable today, became customary at some stage (presumably only after the formal creation of the category of the supporters of the monks, *śramaṇopāsaka*, and of the concept of the fourfold community, *caturvidha-tīrtha*) may be inferred from an epi-

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Hillebrandt 1897:91, 1929:371, who stressed that the re-burial of the relics in the context of a Vedic *pitṛmedha* was a joyful occasion and celebrated with music.

<sup>110</sup> See Parry 1994:184f. for “Hindu” parallels. For details of modern Jaina lay funerals see *infra*. Ethnographies and modern funeral guidelines for expatriate Jains in the UK and North America reveal many “Hindu” elements. See Oshwal Association of the U.K. 2002:11–21, Salgia 2004. The flexibility of lay practices is exemplified by Salgia's 2004:16 recommendation: “Generally, Jains do not collect ashes, but if this is specifically desired, then that is to be arranged.”

sode in Viy<sub>1</sub> 3.1.2a (160b–166a). This passage narrates the punishment of the Asuras by the Devas led by Īsāṇa (Īśāṇa), the ruler of the northern half of the lowest celestial sphere, after their maltreatment of the corpse of the non-Jaina ascetic Tāmila, although he is portrayed as “unwise” because of his instrumental rather than salvifically oriented practice of asceticism.<sup>111</sup> Since there are no doctrinal reasons for protecting the integrity of the dead body for its ritual re-creation in heaven by way of cremation, one of the main concerns of the followers of Jainism must have been the public image of their tradition in the eyes of their opponents. If so, then it may have been an important motive for the creation of funerary rituals and monuments as well.<sup>112</sup>

It should be noted that in current practice mythical narratives of the funerals of the Jinas (paradigmatically the description of Ṛṣabha’s *parinirvāṇa* in the first book of Ācārya Hemacandra’s TŚPC 6.459–643, which focuses on the powerful miraculous qualities of the relics, a theme applied in the last book to Mahāvīra as well)<sup>113</sup> are never explicitly invoked as ritual blueprints for monastic funerals today,<sup>114</sup> nor are the few known Sanskrit manuals for Jaina lay funerals. Jaina practices of cremation and constructing memorials for the special dead are based

<sup>111</sup>) Similar reasons are given by Baudhāyana Gr̥hyasūtra 3.11f. for the burial of Brāhmaṇical renouncers, or *parivrajakas*. See Pandey 1969/1993:271.

<sup>112</sup>) Cf. Schopen 1992/1997 on the role of “social censure” in early Buddhism. Another concern must have been the prevention of sorcery with the help of body relics.

<sup>113</sup>) The text is largely based on JDP, JĀĀ, ĀvN and their commentaries, especially the ĀvC, and Haribhadra’s eighth-century Āvaśyaka Vṛtti (ĀvV), and earlier universal histories of Śīlaṅka and the Digambara *ācārya* Jinasena. See Alsdorf 1936:117; Bruhn 1954:9, 56, 113; and Balbir 1993:83–5, 133. Most Digambara accounts of Ṛṣabha’s funeral differ from the Śvetāmbara versions by not mentioning bone relics, though sometimes ashes are referred to, and generally omitting the episode of the removal of the relics by the gods. However, according to the Digambara *ācārya* Jinasena’s influential ninth-century Ādi Purāṇa (ĀP) 47.343–354 Ṛṣabha’s cremation was performed by the gods who, having collected the ashes, *bhasma*, were asked by humans for a share (resembling the request to the Brahmin Droṇa to share the relics of the Buddha), who then smeared them on their limbs, in an attempt to fully absorb his purity, *pavitra*, in the manner of Hindu *bhakti* devotionism.

<sup>114</sup>) I use the term “monastic funeral” both in a general and in a specific sense: designating funeral rites performed for a mendicant, and funeral rites performed by mendicants for a mendicant. In context, the intended meaning is unambiguous.

on custom, not on textual prescription, for which there is scant and rather late evidence (Sangave 1980:251).<sup>115</sup> This does not rule out the possibility that the extant funeral customs for mendicants were once consciously informed by the procedures that were described by Jaina monks in the Jaina proto-Purāṇas and universal histories (or the other way round),<sup>116</sup> in the same way as Hindu funeral practices today are influenced by Purāṇic models (cf. Bayly 1981:184f.). They are certainly reflected in texts such as Vardhamāna Sūri's fifteenth-century Ācāradinakara (ĀD<sub>2</sub>), which contains the first known depiction of Jaina lay funerals, which for lay followers of the Kharatara Gaccha pre-

<sup>115</sup> The earliest known Śvetāmbara text that prescribes funerals or last rites, *antya-saṃskāra*, not for mendicants but for Jaina laity, seems to be the Kharatara Gaccha ācārya Vardhamāna Sūri's Ācāradinakara (ĀD<sub>2</sub>, pp. 68–72), which, according to Williams 1963/1983:xxiv, was composed as late as 1411, and contains many “accretions from Hinduism,” but not *śrāddha*, which is also not mentioned in the ĀP, the first text to delimit Jaina life-cycle rituals, as Jaini 1979:302f. pointed out. Glasenapp summarized the mortuary rites depicted in the ĀD, including the construction of relic shrines (the English rendition of S. B. Shrotri has been amended), while adding personal observations:

The dead body is put down on the ground, washed, anointed with perfumes and newly dressed. Then it is put on a bier and carried by four near relatives on the shoulders to the place of cremation, where a pyre is kept ready, which is placed on a stone, to prevent the destruction of other living beings. The wooden pile is kindled with the fire that is brought from the house of the deceased. Once the corpse is reduced to ash, the mourners return home. On the third day the ash is then thrown into a river by a near relative, while the bones are put down at a consecrated place. (Pyramid-shaped funerary monuments are later often erected over the latter, topped by a water pot [Kalaśa] made of stone.) Then the survivors go to the temple and venerate the Jina-images, and to an Upāśraya, where a monk gives preaches to them on the ephemerality of all that is worldly. — On account of the death the relatives are impure for up to ten days. Death rituals (Śrāddha), as practised by the Hindus, do not take place among right-believing Jinas. (Glasenapp 1925:417/1999:460f.)

Paul Dundas pointed to the Digambara Bhaṭṭāraka Somasena's 1610 Traivarnīkacāra (T) for an early set of rules for Digambara lay funerals (Paper for Panel A9–229: Jain Studies Consultation, AAR Conference, Montreal 9.11.2009).

<sup>116</sup> Since the cremation of mendicants involves the use of fire and other violent practices, the early Jaina authors must have shied away from prescribing funeral rituals, though they may have communicated the same in a mythological guise.

scribes jainized Vedic style cremation, disposal of bone relics and periods of impurity, combined with Jaina style image veneration and instruction by monks.<sup>117</sup> In fact, I would argue that Jaina funeral practices, especially the preservation and worship of relics, are part of what Assmann (2000:34) calls the “cultural unconscious,” that is, the forgotten, ignored, obsolete, hidden, excluded, suppressed or disrespected elements of a living tradition that are still accessible but that lie outside the official tradition and are therefore “freely at one’s disposal.”

### Prehistory of the Jaina *samādhi*

The historical existence of funerary monuments for prominent Jaina mendicants is well known. Clear textual, epigraphical and archaeological evidence for Jaina *samādhis* is available from medieval times, if not unequivocally for earlier periods.<sup>118</sup> Yet, surprisingly, it has rarely been conjectured that many, if not most, of these *samādhis* are veritable relic *stūpas*, despite the accumulation of much indirect evidence of varying quality. The Śvetāmbara author Haribhadra (II), placed by Williams (1965:106) into the twelfth to thirteenth centuries,<sup>119</sup> in a famous

<sup>117</sup> See also the section on *guru-stūpa-pratiṣṭhā-vidhir-adhikārah* including *stūpa-pūjā* given in the Kharataragaccha *muni* Samayasundara’s 1616 *Sāmācārīśatakam* (SS) 81 (pp. 252f.).

<sup>118</sup> See Bühler 1890b:328f.; Commissariat 1935, 1938, 1940–1957; Granoff 1992, 1994:151; Laughlin 2003:200; Dundas 2007:54f. and Bakker 2007:39, 30, n. 67 who argues that *samādhis* and *chatris* emerged in North-India only after 1200 CE, “possibly under Islamic influence” (ibid.:1, 35, n. 79), with the exception of one “true *eḍūka*” at site T at Vākāṭaka in Mansar dated c. 500 CE (ibid.:41) that is considered to be Buddhist or Jaina (ibid.:39, 30, n. 67). The oldest reference to a Jaina commemorative funeral monument or a relic *stūpa* is the Hāthigumphā inscription of circa second or first century BCE which mentions a *niśidhi*. Settar 1990:75, Fig. 16 reproduces a relief at Śravaṇabelāgoḷa which shows monks paying respect to a *śilākuṭā*. He also points to EC II, SB.532, as the sole epigraphic reference to the practice of cremation in the historical record of Digambaras in South India: the incineration of the layman Ecirāja who in the c. twelfth century died a *sanyasana* death in Jinanāthapura, a death initiated by a vow of renunciation of bondage, which was commemorated with a *śilākuṭā*, a memorial of stone, created at the place of his cremation by his mother (ibid.:273, 74). See also footnote 121.

<sup>119</sup> With good reasons, Williams attributes the Saṃbodha Prakaraṇa not (like the Kharatara Gaccha commentators) to the eighth-century Haribhadra Sūri “Yākinī-

attack on the *caityavāsins*, or temple-dwelling pseudo-monks, complains in his *Samboḍha Prakaraṇa* (SP) about their unorthodox custom of building funerary monuments or *stūpas*.<sup>120</sup> The Śvetāmbara canon already contains several references to *thūbhas* and *ceiyas*, the majority collected by Pischel (1900/1981/1999:§§ 208, 134). It is not clear, however, whether the *stūpas* mentioned in the Āyāranga II,<sup>121</sup> one of the oldest canonical texts, are Jaina or, more likely, non-Jaina sacred sites. Though Schubring (1935/2000:§ 25:49f.), echoing Bhagwānlāl (1885:144),<sup>122</sup> suspected that the description of the heavenly worship

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putra,” who is explicitly mentioned in the printed edition, SP 59a, but to another Haribhadra of the 12th or later centuries: “There is special interest in stressing that the *Samboḍha-prakaraṇa* is not his work because it has all too often been quoted as evidence that he was an opponent of *caitya-vāsa*. That he was in fact its supporter is indicated, explicitly in the *Ṣoḍaśaka* and implicitly in the *Aṣṭaka*, despite his commentator’s efforts to prove the contrary” (Williams 1965:106). For further references, see Balbir 1993:83, n. 142.

<sup>120</sup> SP II (Chapter: Atha Gurvadhikāraḥ) v. 71, p. 14a: *naṃdi-bali-piḍha-karaṇaṃ hīṇāyārāṇa mayāṇiya-gurūṇaṃ*. They get “topes constructed where their lascivious preceptors [whose conduct is bad] were cremated” (N. Sahal’s translation of Nathmal’s 1968/2000:3 Hindi translation). It is not clear, however, what kind of shrine is referred to by *naṃdi-bali-piḍha*. See also Flügel 2008b:240.

<sup>121</sup> ĀS<sub>1</sub> 2.1.2.3 & ĀS<sub>2</sub>: *thūbha-mahesu* (S. *stūpa-mahotsava*), ĀS<sub>1</sub> 2.3.3.1 & ĀS<sub>2</sub>: *caiyakaṇḍa thūbha* (S. *caityakṛta stūpa*). ĀS<sub>1</sub> 2.10.17: *maḍaya-thūbhiyā* (S. *mṛtaka-stūpikā*). In his translation of the passage, Jacobi rendered *maḍaya-thūbhiyā*, which the text contrasts with *mṛtaka-caitya*, ambiguously as “sarcophagous”: “A monk or a nun should not ease nature where charcoal or potash is produced, or the dead are burnt, or on the sarcophaguses or shrines of the dead.” For the original text, see ĀS<sub>2</sub> 2.10.23.

<sup>122</sup> Bhagwānlāl’s 1885:143 drawing of an inscribed sculpture found by himself in Mathurā (together with Leumann’s 1885a summary of the description of relic worship in the Rāyapaseṇaijja) was regarded by Bühler 1890b:328 as the first proof “that the Jainas formerly worshiped Stūpas.” Interestingly enough, “Premachandraji, a learned yati of the *Kharatara Gachcha*”, that is, a monastic order that is renowned for its funerary monuments, gave Bhagwānlāl 1885:138 the false impression that the items inside the *sthāpanācāryas* (on which see Shah 1987:19f.) used in the rituals of Mūrtipūjaka monks, represent relics of the Tīrthaṅkaras:

Like the Buddhists the early Jainas also worshipped the bone-relics of Tīrthaṅkaras. Their books generally mention that after death Tīrthaṅkaras are burnt by the gods who take away their bones to svarga for worship. The Jaina



of the relics of the Jinas, *jiṇa-sakahā* (S. *sakthin* = *asthi*), “most certainly follows earthly examples” and that the Jains must have “erected stūpas since long,” he remained skeptical about the either “untenable” or “inexplicable” interpretations of Jayaswal (1918) of the famous Hāthīgumphā inscription of king Khāravela of Kālīṅga at Udayagiri (Orissa) from the second to first century BCE (Sircar 1965:213–21) which offers what seems to be the first epigraphic evidence of bone relic *stūpa* worship amongst the Jains, though no relic chamber was found at the site of the “*stūpa*” which was excavated nearby.<sup>123</sup> In line 14 of the inscription, the words *kāyya-nisīdīya* or *kāya-nisīdīyā* appear, which Jayaswal and Banerji (1933:89) translated as “relic memorial,” though the word *kāya*, corporeal, could also refer to the body of a living monk and *kāya-nisīdīyā* to the caves at Udayagiri themselves, offered as a resting place for monks during their rain retreat, as critics such as Barua (1929:46, 301; 1938:468, 480–82)<sup>124</sup> pointed out.<sup>125</sup>

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temples of the present do not show any *stūpas* or worship of the bones of Tīrthaṃkaras, but there can be little doubt that the practice once existed, as so late as the thirteenth century the Jainas were worshipping at Mathurā a large stūpa taking it to be the stūpa of the Tīrthaṃkara Supārśva [note 1 refers to Jinaprabhasūri’s Tīrthakalpa, P. F.]. At the present day Jaina *sādhus* of the Kharatara *gachcha* use for worship a five-toothed sandal goblet called *thāpanā* and this is a copy of the jaws of the Tīrthaṃkaras. So the Jaina nuns or *sādhvīs* use for worship as *thāpanā* a kind of shell, *śankha*, which they take to be the knee bones of Mahāvīrasvāmī. These facts prove that *stūpas* and tree worship were common among early Jainas. (p. 144)

<sup>123</sup>) “The Nishīdī at the Kumārī Hill (the Hill where the inscription is engraved) was not an ornamental tomb but a real stūpa, for it is qualified *kāyya*, corporeal (i.e. ‘having remains of the body’). Thus it seems that the Jains called their stūpas or chaityas *Nishīdīs*. The Jaina stūpa discovered at Mathurā and the datum of the *Bhadra-bāhu-charita* saying that the disciples of Bhadrabāhu worshipped the bones of their Master, establish the fact that the Jainas (at any rate the Digambaras) observed the practice of erecting monuments on the remains of their teachers...” (Jayaswal 1918:338f.).

<sup>124</sup>) He offered an alternative, equally imaginative, reading. The view of “Jina Vijaya Sūri” reported in a footnote (p. 481, n. 203) that “the Jaina recluses referred to in the inscription belonged, in all likelihood, to the Yāpana-saṃgha,” (i.e., to a “heterodox” Jaina sect from the Śvetāmbara point of view), is being recycled in the literature (see also the attribution of the Mathurā finds to the “heterodox” Ardhamālakas by U. P. Shah and others, discussed by Jaini 1995:479ff.).

<sup>125</sup>) Sircar 1942/1965:217 & 220, accordingly, explained *kāyanisīdīyā*, S. *kāya-nisīdīyā*,

According to Upadhye (1982:46), the word *nisīhiyā* (S. *nisidhi*, etc.), seat or resting place especially of a Digambara ascetic who performs the death-fast, refers to a memorial erected either at the spot of the religious death, *saṃlekhanā*, or of the cremation of a Jaina ascetic, or “where his bone relics etc., were buried.”<sup>126</sup> On the evidence of Digambara *nisidhis* in southern India, Settar (1989:215, 268) and Dundas (2006:400, n. 37) assume that the word *nisidhi* referred exclusively to commemorative monuments “rather than a physical relic.”

The reluctance of archaeologists to consider the early historical existence of Jaina relic *stūpas* is unsurprising, since no Jaina (but also no Vedic) bone relics have ever been found, not even at the *stūpa* excavated at the site known as Kaṅkāli Tīlā,<sup>127</sup> in Mathurā,<sup>128</sup> where many

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with “*varṣāsu viśrāma-lābhāya*.” Jayaswal’s and Banerjee’s reading of this passage was restated by Kant 1971/2000:30; Kant was criticized by Norman 1973; Schwarzschild 1975 and von Hinüber 1975 who all, like Schubring, refrained from commenting on *kāya-nisīdīya*.

<sup>126</sup> “[I]t must be seen whether it is correct to render *nisīdīyā* as *stūpa* in the Khāravala inscription” (Upadhye 1933:264–6).

<sup>127</sup> Literally, “hill of skeletons.” Kaṅkāli is also the name of a Hindu goddess (Durga) which is still venerated at the site, next to a cremation ground.

<sup>128</sup> Further suggested sites of “Jaina *stūpas*,” in Udayagiri/Orissa (Bhagwānlāl 1885:143f., Jayaswal 1918), Rāmnagar (A.A. Führer’s Progress Report of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh for 1891–2, Epigraphical Section, cited by Lüders 1912:161, Glasenapp 1925:398 / 1999:440f.), Taxila (Marshall 1951 II:463–66), Pakbira, Benusagar, Kesnagarh (Choudhury 1956:47, 65), Maniyar Maṭh, Rājagrha, (District Gazetteer of Patna, in Choudhury 1956:93), Vaḍḍamāṇu (Sastri et al. 1992; Kasturibai & Rao 1995), and Gajapantha near Maṅgī Tuṅgī (Hegewald 2009:135f.) revealed no evidence of relic worship. The evidence for a Jaina *stūpa* in Rāmnagar has been conclusively deconstructed by Lüders 1912:161–7. See also Huxley forthcoming, pp. 8f. The credentials of the *stūpas* in Taxila and Vaḍḍamāṇu to be Jaina rather than Buddhist monuments have been questioned with good arguments. Shah 1955/1998:10 insisted that “the total absence of any other Jaina relic in the whole site [of Taxila] excavated hitherto cannot be disregarded.” The evidence at Vaḍḍamāṇu is also slight and, despite the name of the site, cannot establish beyond reasonable doubt the existence of a Jaina *stūpa* “in the midst of a grand Buddhist desert” (Shastri 2000:165). Whether the unnamed structure at Gajapantha photographed by Hegewald 2009:135, though “closely resembling the shape of a *stūpa*” (ibid.:136), represents a memorial is unclear. Claims for *stūpa* structures in Rājagrha cited by Choudhury 1956:92 and in Patna by Hegewald 2009:17 are equally speculative.

Jaina votive tablets, *āyāgapāṭa*, depicting *stūpa* worship with flowers, etc., and inscriptions pointing to their Jaina origin<sup>129</sup> were discovered;<sup>130</sup> these led Bühler (1891:61f.) to the conclusion that the *stūpa* was constructed by Jains “several centuries before the beginning of the Christian era.”<sup>131</sup> However, “no record of all these operations has ever been published, so there is almost no proof as to the exact finding places of the objects of the Kaṅkāli Tīlā,” as Lüders (1961:41) later remarked.<sup>132</sup> The entry by Alois Anton Führer (1892:141) in his list of *Accessions to the Lucknow Museum During the Month of March 1890* stating that “10 pieces of old pottery filled with the ashes of some Jaina monks” were “excavated from the Kaṅkāli Tīlā, Mathurā” and donated by the unnamed “Assistant Archaeological Surveyor, North-Western Provinces

<sup>129</sup> Shah 1987:28, n. 45 and Jaini 1995/2000:311 associate the inscriptions and reliefs, identified as Digambara by Führer (Bühler 1890a:169), with the Jaina Arddhaphālaka (S. Ardhaphālaka) sect which, they argue, was identical with the now extinct Yāpanīya tradition.

<sup>130</sup> The excavations at Kaṅkāli Tīlā were begun in 1888 by Burgess and continued by Führer in 1889–1891 and 1896 on request of Bühler (Lüders 1961:40). Based on a letter from Führer dated 11.3.1890, Bühler 1890a:169, 1890b:313f., reported the finds and speculated: “I see also a trace of the worship of Stūpas in the Chaityavandana, the worship of Chaityas, incumbent on all Śrāvakas, and I believe that the term *chaitya* or *cheia* originally meant ‘a funerary monument in honour of a teacher or prophet,’ not a temple as it is now interpreted” (ibid.:328f.).

<sup>131</sup> See Bühler’s 1891:61f. initial comments on a rubbing of the inscription describing a “Voḍḍha (?) Stūpa,” received from Führer 27.12.1890. Bühler 1892a, 1892b, 1894a, 1894b, 1896, 1898 published, translated and analyzed most of the inscriptions. See also the work of Lüders 1961, Shah 1987:15f. and Quintanilla 2000, 2007. The *stūpa* in Mathurā is frequently referred to in Śvetāmbara and Digambara Jaina literature, which strengthened Bühler’s argument. For instance in BKB 5824, Hariṣeṇa’s Bṛhatkathakośa (BKK) pp. 22–27, composed 932 CE, Somadeva’s tenth-century Yaśastilakacampū (YC) VI.17–18, Jinaprabha Sūri’s fourteenth-century VTK pp. 17f. and MSS, and Rājamallā’s sixteenth-century Jambūsvāmicaritra, cited by A. N. Upadhye in BKK, p. 379. These sources, and the evidence in ĀvC p. 567 pointing to a *stūpa* of Munisuvrata in Vesālā (Vaiśālī), and a copper of Pāhārpur in Bengal dated 479 CE, unearthed by Dikshit 1933:62 (EI 20), referring to a “Nirgranthanātha *āchārya* Guhanandin belonging to the Pañcha-stūpa section of Benares” (Majumdar 1943 I:410), are reviewed by Shah 1955/1998:62–4.

<sup>132</sup> See also Lüders 1912; Lüders 1961:43, n. 2 and the work of Falk 1991; Phelps 2007 and Huxley 2006.

and Oudh Circle,” that is himself,<sup>133</sup> was never commented upon. If the ashes came indeed from the location of the *stūpa* at Kaṅkāli Tīlā, which according to Jinaprabha Sūri’s unlikely account was repaired in the eighth century on the instructions of Bappabhaṭṭi Sūri,<sup>134</sup> rather than from the two Jaina temples, apparently destroyed in the twelfth century,<sup>135</sup> or from other locations nearby, then this would be the oldest archaeological evidence for Jaina bone relic worship. Unfortunately, no further details are given, and it remains uncertain whether the relic vessels are still in existence, if they ever were<sup>136</sup> (Fig. 18).

For an archaeologist, the only way to conclusively prove the proposed hypothesis that many if not most surviving historical Jaina funerary monuments are in fact relic *stūpas* would be to conduct excavations at the sites of existing *samādhis*, an activity understandably prevented by Jaina communities, or to undertake expensive ground-penetrating radar scans.<sup>137</sup> Alternatively, one must wait for one or other find that emerges during the frequent renovations or relocations of *samādhis* to be reported.

<sup>133</sup> I am grateful to my colleague Andrew Huxley for pointing me to the *Accessions to the Lucknow Museum* and sharing his yet unpublished findings on the life and work of Führer with me.

<sup>134</sup> VTK, cited rather doubtfully by Shah 1955/1998:64: “it is not likely that even a few sculptures of Bhappabhaṭṭi’s age could not survive at the site.” Handiqui 1949/1968:433 infers that the *stūpa* still existed at the time of the tenth-century Digambara author Somadeva, who in his *Yaśastilaka* of 959 CE mentions that the *stūpa* in Mathurā “is still known by the name of Devanirmīta.” According to the introduction to the VMP by Agaracanda and Bhaṃṇavaralāla Nāhaṭā, p. 11, Jinaprabha himself caused the “Mathurā Tīrtha” to be renovated.

<sup>135</sup> Smith 1901:48 commented on inscription Fig. 3 in his book on Führer’s Mathurā findings: “The inscription was recorded within about five years of the sack of Mathurā by Mahmūd of Ghaznī in A.D. 1018, when the temples are said to have been burnt. It would seem that the Jain temples of the Kankālī mound must have escaped destruction.”

<sup>136</sup> Thus far, the present writer’s efforts to trace these reliquaries which usually contain bone relics have been without success. It is unclear why Führer refers to “Jaina monks.”

<sup>137</sup> See also Bakker 2007:25 on the lack of archaeological investigation of Hindu memorials.



Figure 18. Hindu women venerate an ancient fragment of the Jain Stūpa or temples at Kaṅkālī Ṭilā depicting Kubera while pieces of broken Jina statues receive less attention, photo by the author 6.1.2010.

### Jaina Monastic Funerals and the Theory of Secondary Burial

The Indian pre-history of the practices of collecting (*asthi-saṃcayana*) and burying charred bones and ashes after cremation and erecting sepulchral monuments, *śmaśāna*, is uncertain.<sup>138</sup> As a general practice,

<sup>138)</sup> Falk 2000:78 stressed that early Vedic literature, especially the late Ṛg Veda (RV) 10.15.14, does not contain a single unequivocal passage on the abandonment or burial of cremated remains nor on inhumation. By contrast, the late Vedic Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra (ĀGS) 4.5 (c. 500 BCE) prescribes the ceremonial collection in an urn and burial of the remaining charred bones after a cremation while reciting the verses of RV 10.18.11–13 which themselves ambiguously refer to burial mounds: *sādāna* = “*citi* oder *çmaçāna*” (Hillebrandt 1929:371; Geldner 1923/2003:260, n. 1 interprets RV 7.89.1 as referring to an urn). Secondary burials of charred bones and ashes are also described in the Piṭṛmedha Sūtras, in particular the Bhāradvājapitṛmedha Sūtra and the earlier Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa (JB) 1.46–49, both summarized by Falk 2000:75–7. See Caland’s 1896:§ 53–60:99–112 classical textual study of the rituals

secondary burial pre-dates the Vedic period.<sup>139</sup> For Vedic and post-Vedic developments, three principal developmental stages are posited by most Vedic scholars today: (a) inhumation, (b) cremation and subsequent burial of the remains, with or without a funerary monument, (c) cremation and subsequent immersion of the remains. The continuing presence of all these practices in contemporary India shows that, generally, later developments did not replace earlier ones but were added on.<sup>140</sup>

In summary fashion, Oldenberg (1894/1917:556f.) noted that the widespread distinction between “preliminary” and “final” burial (the latter facilitating after a transitional period the final integration of the deceased into a yonder world which is celebrated with a collective feast), was also prominent in classical Vedic ritual, where the charred bones remaining after cremation are collected into a jar which is buried under a tree (or hung onto a tree) until it is removed again and either re-buried under a funeral memorial or discarded into the floods of the river Ganges (metaphorically, any river), which is now standard practice. Maybe in order to safeguard the model of double burial, which was later canonized by Hertz (1907/1960)<sup>141</sup> according to whom the separation of flesh and bone by means of cremation is the first significant step of the transformational ritual sequence and the burial of the remains the second,<sup>142</sup> Caland (1896:§ 72:129) suggested

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surrounding the erection of a funerary tumulus (*citi*) containing a bone relic over the cremation ground, *śmaśāna*.

<sup>139)</sup> For archaeological evidence see Das 1969–70, Singh 1970, Gupta 1972, also Ghosh 1989. According to Falk 2000:73, the oldest, isolated, find of several urns filled with charred bones in Cemetery H in Harrappa is dated c. 2000 BCE. See Caland 1896:166f. who found descriptions of the rites for the erection of funeral monuments, *śmaśāna*, only in three Vedic texts: Taittirīya-, Kauśika- and Kātyāyana Sūtras (ibid.:xiii). The *locus classicus* of the inhumation of partially cremated bones is Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra 4.5, citing RV 10.16.14, 10.18.10, 10.18.13. This passage is referred to by Eggeling in footnote three on ŚB 11.6.3.11, containing the curse “not even thy bones shall reach thy home!” On this custom, see in particular ŚB 13.8.3 on the post-cremation burial and the erection of round sepulchral mounds in eastern India. The passage has been widely commented upon, for instance by Caland 1888:24, Das 1969–70:62, Knipe 1977:122, n. 6. and Patil 1982:49f., 57.

<sup>140)</sup> See Butzenberger 1998:3, n. 5.

<sup>141)</sup> Cf. Parkin 1996:195, n. 1.

<sup>142)</sup> Mitra 1870:254f. found already a “double ceremonial of first incineration and

that the second burial of the charred bones and erection of a funeral monument, *śmaśāna*, after cremation and first burial under a tree, was not common but “*facultativ*,” a voluntary practice performed in special cases only, which would also explain why in the texts of the younger Taittirīya schools this ritual is described after the expiation rituals. Hillebrandt (1911:475f.) speculated that “the non-obligatory *śmaśānachiti* may have been originally an independent custom,” since in this case “the urn is not interred, but cast away.”

Alongside immersion, the practice of collecting and re-burying the charred bones at the place of cremation is still mentioned in later ritual manuals that are currently used, such as the *Garuḍa Purāṇa Sāroddhāra* (GPS) 10.75 of Naunidhirāma and the *Antyeṣṭipaddhati* (AP) 4.22 of the sixteenth-century Śivaite author Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa. It was also documented in early “ethnographies” such as Abbé Dubois’s (1817/1943:400, 490) depiction of Brāhmaṇical funeral rites in South India, based on a report of the Jesuit Coeurdoux of 1777 (Bronkhorst 2009:11).<sup>143</sup>

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subsequent burial” depicted in the *Āraṇyaka* of the Black Yajurveda rather than a double burial, but noted that perhaps instead of a first burial the text recommends hanging the urn with the remains from a tree before final burial. See footnote 159.

<sup>143)</sup> Because the practice of double burial is not universally evident in the Vedic and post-Vedic sources, Hertz 1907/1960:43 argued that in India “the cremation, and the burial of the burned bones correspond respectively to the first and the second burial.” In a letter to Pierre Roussel of 9 December 1907, he conceded, however, that cremation is a problem for the theory, because of the swift transition from state A to B, and suggests three possible solutions with a preference for the last: “a) the temporary sojourn of the soul on earth and the period of mourning have nothing to do with the state of the body; b) there is still a double rite, but the second takes place as if the first had not mattered; c) the second rite is reduced to a ‘simple appendix to the cremation,’ as in the Hindu rite — i.e. there is a very short but still perceptible interval” (Parkin 1996:195, n. 1).

Hertz and subsequently Parry 1982:101f., 1994:184–8 focused exclusively on the rebirth symbolism associated with Indic practices of cremation, interpreted as a technique for accelerating the separation of flesh and bone. But the emergence of the custom of disposal of the bone relics through immersion rather than burial or entombment, and the literary motifs of secondary cremation and of the final disappearance of relics, have drawn little attention in the literature, apart from stray remarks.

Jaina cremation rituals and the custom of preserving the relics of renowned ascetics are from a doctrinal point of view purely conventional affairs. Evidently, they merely play on the Vedic symbolism of a ritually solicited ascent of the deceased to heaven, rather than “rendering the deceased person immortal” (Sharf 1992:5) in the manner of a Vedic *antyeṣṭi* or funeral sacrifice, and do not intentionally produce relics, two of the presumed aims of the cremation of Buddhist monks (Strong 2004a:115). In contrast to the official or unofficial practice of preserving relics, which in one way or another presumes a continuing material link between the deceased and the living,<sup>144</sup> Jaina mythology posits the final disappearance of all mortal remains of the Jinas which were taken away by the gods from the middle world.<sup>145</sup> The metaphor of disappearance, I would argue, symbolizes salvation rather than rebirth. Mortuary rituals symbolically associated with salvation, such as the immersion of funerary relics into a river without leaving a trace in the Hindu traditions, or the simple disposal of corpses and their subsequent dismemberment by vultures or other animals in early Jainism, may thus be interpreted as a “tertiary” form of disposal additional to the two older forms discussed by Oldenberg (1894/1917:556f.). In my view, the theoretical distinction between three rather than two forms of disposal (“burial”) may resolve the difficulty, raised by Faure (1991:134f.) and Strong (2004a:116, 235), in applying Hertz’ (1907/1960) general theory of secondary burial to “the funeral of someone who has put an end to passage.” The problem results from

<sup>144</sup> However: “The very existence of a reliquary cult presupposes the notion that there is no possibility of absolute continuity between the community of the living and that of the dead” (Hertz 1907/1960:57).

<sup>145</sup> On Kṛṣṇa’s disappearance, see Bhāgavata Purāṇa (BP) 11.30–31. See Trainor 1997:197 and Strong 2004a:221–28, 230 on Buddhaghosa’s fifth-century account of the reassemblance and final disappearance without a trace of the Buddha’s relics in a self-kindling fire, which can be contrasted with the depiction of Mahāvīra’s death without a written trace on his remains in Jinacariya 128. In the same way, in the late Vedic tradition, which is echoed by this Buddhist motif, the continuing existence of relics represents the continuing life of the ancestors in heaven. See Caland’s 1896:§ 60:110–12 characterization of the “facultative” rite of *punardāha* or re-burning after which no bones are left, which is mentioned only in the Taittirīyakaṇḍas: “Nach dieser Wiederverbrennung kann natürlich das Grabdenkmal (śmaśāna) nicht errichtet werden, weil die Knochen fehlen” (ibid.:111).



the non-differentiation of funerals for a mendicant who is reborn as a god in heaven from funerals for a being that has died its final death, because only the first type of funeral can be interpreted as a rite of social regeneration in Hertz' sense.<sup>146</sup> In the case of the destruction or removal of all relics without a trace, symbolic representations of the deceased and his teaching remain the only points of reference for social reproduction, though in practice such conceptual distinctions are easily confounded.

Schopen (1994b/2005:361) revived the argument that “the Hindu deposition of mortuary remains at a *tīrtha* and the Buddhist deposition at a *stūpa* are functional — in part, even formal — equivalents,” aimed at securing the attainment of heaven (ibid.:363). Strong (2004a: 174) added: “or, alternatively, liberation (*mokṣa*).” He argues that in the case of the Buddha “the new steady state that is passed into is that of the relics,” rather than *nibbāna* (ibid.:235). His evidence is the peculiar and almost unique method of the Buddha's cremation which produced not charred bones, as usual, but “gem-like relic-grains” untainted by any ashes (Strong 2007b:44f.). The assumption here is that the two practices of burning a corpse on a pyre and dissolving it in an iron casket of boiling oil produce relics of different quality and value. Hence, these represent two different types of funerals.<sup>147</sup>

One of the problems with this argument derives from the Buddhist rejection of the animistic doctrine of spiritual substances on which Hertz' version of the theory of psycho-physical parallelism is predicated. In the Jain case, and in Hindu soteriologies,<sup>148</sup> there is no

<sup>146</sup> Rozenberg 2007:114 also focuses on the contradiction between rebirth and the accomplishment of *nirvāṇa*. But his argument that the preservation of the relics of an extraordinary saint, *arabant*, who is cremated in the same manner as common monks in Burma indicates the monk's accomplishment of liberation echoes Levin's 1930, Sharf's 1992:5 and Strong's 2004a:235 “somewhat artificial” conclusion that, in the absence of the notion of a liberated soul, the relics of a cremated Buddhist saint that are preserved are “the new steady state that is passed into.”

<sup>147</sup> A US American undertaker, interviewed by Strong 2004a:106, n. 21, confirmed that “frying” a corpse in oil would indeed liquefy the flesh and leave the uncharred bones floating in a greasy “mess.”

<sup>148</sup> See Davis 1988:41, 46, 49 analysis of the revisionist Śaiva Siddhānta cremation ritual which is not only defined as a sacrificial act but also as an expiation, *prāyaścitta*, as a “door to final *mokṣa*” for the soul, *ātman*, of the initiated *mumukṣu*: “For his soul,

doctrinal problem in defining “what” is passing “where” after final salvation, as in the case of the Buddha’s *parinibbāna*. An immortal spiritual entity, both life-force and omniscient essence, we are told, is migrating to a realm of the liberated souls, *jīva* or *ātman*, located not beyond but within the physical confines of the world. The imagery is one of immanent transcendence. In the case of liberation, however, no physical remnant is left that is of intrinsic religious value. Only the *dharma* and the *saṅgha* remain and symbolic representations of the deceased.

### Contemporary Jaina Funerals

Jaina laity today practice a wide variety of funeral ceremonies that represent variations of Brāhmaṇical custom. Particularly interesting is the fate of the remains, *avasesa* (S. *avaśeṣa*), of well known Jaina ascetics, usually *ācāryas*, in particular of the charred pieces of bones, *haddī*, and nails, *nack*, which do not burn away completely.<sup>149</sup> Because of their shape, they are colloquially called “flowers,” *puspa*, in Rājasthān.<sup>150</sup> Generally, as in the Vedic tradition, the terms *asthi* (P. *aṭṭhi*), bone, and *bhasma*, ash, are used to refer to funerary relics. The Buddhist preference for the terms *dhātu* (P. *dhāu*), essence, and *śarīrāṇi* (P. *śarīrāṇi*), body relics, is not replicated in the Jaina tradition.<sup>151</sup> Relics are usually not, as in Buddhism, under the tight control of clerics and “confined within the ritually defined boundaries of monastic complexes” (Trainor

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death is no passage to a realm of ancestor spirits or to another human rebirth, but to the altogether different ontological state of liberation, in which it becomes completely similar to Śiva” (ibid.:44).

<sup>149</sup>) Occasionally, the robe of an ascetic does not burn and thus acquires the aura of “immortality.” The clothing and *muḥapattī* of Jinadatta Sūri of the Kharatara Gaccha, for instance, are displayed in the famous Jaina *bhaṇḍārā* in Jaisalmer. In Jaina narrative literature similar practices are described.

<sup>150</sup>) Cf. Grodzins Gold 1990:79, 124; Parry 1994:188. For similar analogies between bodily relics and flowers in Europe see Goody and Poppi 1994:160, n. 39 cited by Dundas 1997:140.

<sup>151</sup>) Taylor 1993:176 observed that in Buddhist northern Thailand uncrystallized bone fragments of monks are called *atthi* but are not considered relics worthy of worship which are designated *phrathaāt* = *śarīrika-dhātu*. Strong 2004a: 12 notes that the Sanskrit version of the MPNS “refers to the Buddha’s remains as *asthi*.”

1997:31). On the contrary, most of the desirable bone relics and ashes find their way into the households of common Jain laity, and some are kept by individual Jaina mendicants.

Many Jains collect the ashes and charred bones after a common lay cremation and bury them either at the site of cremation or at an unmarked spot outside the village or town.<sup>152</sup> Amongst the Osvāls in North India today, usually the eldest son of a deceased person carefully scrutinizes the ash for *puṣpas* on the day after the cremation.<sup>153</sup> They are put into an earthen jug, *kulhara* or *kulhari*, and are then taken either by a family member or by a Brahmin family priest, *purohita*, to a sacred spot along the Ganges or another river, to be cast into its floods, *phūla bolāṇo*.<sup>154</sup> Sometimes, the bones of family ancestors, *pitara*, which Hindus usually store in a jar in order to submerge them later into a river or into the sea,<sup>155</sup> are now collected by Rājasthānī Osvāls and placed under memorial stones at the place of cremation, as was done in the Vedic period and by the Rājputs in the not too distant past.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>152)</sup> Documentations of variant Jaina funeral customs in the colonial Gazetteers reveal many parallels to Brāhmaṇical customs prescribed in ritual texts such as the AP and the Jaina ĀD, but also deliberate omissions and changes, especially in the cremation rituals for ascetics. See Campbell 1886:144–46; Stevenson 1918:494; Sangave 1980:345f., 250, 252.

<sup>153)</sup> Strong 2004a:11, referring to R. Buswell's personal communication, Rupert 2000:291 and Taylor 1993:175–7, notes that in Korea, Japan and Thailand “unburnt bone fragments are... not considered to be relics,” only crystallized gem-like relics.

<sup>154)</sup> The origins of this “Hindu” custom are obscure and are discussed by Mishra 1991:50. Stevenson 1910:48 observed interesting variations between Hindu and Jaina customs of cremation and the river disposal of the remains in Gujarat. In rare cases the ashes of Jaina laity are buried at the site of cremation and covered with a platform, *caukī*, to become a place of commemoration. See Glasenapp 1925: 417/1999:460 on relevant textual prescriptions in the ĀD.

<sup>155)</sup> Reportedly, Hindus assume that the spirits of those that have died are embodied in the flowers. See Grodzins Gold 1990:61, 63, 85–89, ch. 4 and Kane 1941/1953:242 for textual sources of such modern practices. Strong 2004a:11, 14–16 cites the key evidence in ĀGS 4.5 and Goswamy 1980:6 for Hindu practices of searching for bone fragments after the cremation and for the burial of the uncremated bodies of Hindu *sannyāsins* (who died their first death during initiation).

<sup>156)</sup> A great number of cenotaphs for the leaders and ordinary members of the Hindu Dadu Panthī sect in Naryana near Jaipur are mentioned by Mishra 1991:106. For

Similar procedures of cremation are observed in monastic funerals. There is only legendary evidence for Shah's (1955/1998:60) suggestion that in Jaina monastic funerals, as in the case of the Buddha, "the cremation is done in such a way as to save the various bones."<sup>157</sup> Cremation fires in modern India do not differ much from those described in the texts. They do not produce pristine relics, but leave a messy jumble of ashes and pieces of charred bone. The *puṣpas* of common Jaina monks and nuns are usually discarded in the desert or submerged into a river, without ever involving Brahmins. Only the *puṣpas* of exceptional monks (rarely, if ever, nuns) are treated differently.<sup>158</sup> They are not all cast away, but at least some are preserved in one or another building until they are buried underneath either simple cremation platforms, *cabūtarās*, or elaborate funeral monuments, constructed in a variety of shapes over or near the sites of cremation. Similar to Vedic<sup>159</sup> and Buddhist customs,<sup>160</sup> the collection of relics is not a public event.<sup>161</sup> Pieces of bone, *asthi*, and ashes, *bhasma*, are usually snuck away in the

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late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hindu *śmaśāna* temples or *samādhi-mandiras* of the Bhawal Rājas in Joydevpur Bengal, see Choudhury 2007:63. For evidence from post-canonical Jaina texts, see Granoff 2003:202f.

<sup>157</sup> The quasi Vedic method described by Hemacandra differs from the one depicted in the Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta according to which the corpse of the Buddha was cooked in oil until all flesh was dissolved to generate pristine relics: "When the flesh, et cetera had been consumed, the Stanita-gods at once extinguished the pyre with water from the Ocean of Milk" (TŚPC 13.245–272, translated by Johnson 1962 VI:351, cf. TŚPC 6.522–565, translated by Johnson 1931 I:364).

<sup>158</sup> In contemporary Thailand also, two types of Buddhist monks are distinguished: saints, *arahān* (S. *arhanta*) and common monks. Only the "wish-fulfilling" relics, *atthi*, of the former are keenly collected. See Tambiah 1984:20ff.; Taylor 1993:175–7. See also Rozenberg 2007:128 for the preservation of relics exclusively of the Buddhist saints, *yahanda*, of Burma.

<sup>159</sup> RV 10.18.10–13 recited in the ĀGS 4.5 pp. 85f. Compare Heesterman 1993:175 and Malamoud 1999:137f. on the *asthi-yajña*, sacrifice of bones, in Vedic *sattra* ritual.

<sup>160</sup> See for instance Keyes 1975:54, n. 21, pp. 58f., Tambiah 1984:108–10, Brac de la Perrière 2001:252 on the direct involvement of Buddhist monks in the collection and distribution of bones and ashes.

<sup>161</sup> Since the present author was given funerary remains (ashes) both from a Sthānakavāsī (Śramaṇasaṅgha) and Mūrtipūjaka (Tapā Gaccha) monk, it is clear that, at least in some cases, Jaina monks are informally also involved in the collection and distribution of funerary relics.

early hours of the morning after the cremation by eager devotees. The rest are collected in an unceremonious manner by officials, without the ritual precautions of brāhmaṇical *asthi-saṃcayana* procedures.<sup>162</sup> Only for Jaina lay funerals several reports of the customary performance of quasi Brāhmaṇical rituals exist<sup>163</sup> such as circumambulating the pyre anti-clockwise, pouring water mixed with milk on the ashes,<sup>164</sup> collecting the remaining charred bones systematically,<sup>165</sup> beginning with

<sup>162</sup> For late Vedic rules for the collection of the bones after the cremation, see Mitra 1870:253–5 (Āraṇyaka VI of the Black Yajurveda), Caland 1896:§ 53ff.:99f., and Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa's sixteenth-century Antyeṣṭipaddhati (AP) 4.22–26 which still prescribes Vedic practices of secondary burial of relics: first under a tree and then their excavation and final immersion in a river, rather than re-burial (Müller 1992:23, 139–46). For contemporary variations of the basic rite, see Monier-Williams 1891:284f., 302; Oldenberg 1894/1917:581, n. 2; Hillebrandt 1911:476; Knipe 1977:115f. and Crooke 1899:286 on the “survival” of this rite of bone collection in modern Hinduism, “when a day or two after cremation, the bones and ashes are swept up and buried there and then, or reserved for consignment to some holy river.” See Crooke (ibid.:288) and Mitra 1870:254 (Āraṇyaka VI of the Black Yajurveda) for the custom to hang the “urn or bundle... from the branch of a sami or palāsa tree” before final burial, which may be reflected in the Jaina depictions of the veneration of the relics of the Jinās by the gods. Hillebrandt 1911:478 (citing the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay* 3, 8, p. 489, and Caland 1896:105, n. 884) states that accounts of how remains are put in a new barrel and thrown into the water or desert or other lonely place exist only “from the latest period”: “The Kapola Banias tie up bones in a piece of ‘silken cloth, and the bundle so made is suspended to the bough of a tree in the burning-ground’.”

<sup>163</sup> Campbell's 1886:144f. evidence on transportation of sacrificial fire from the home to the cremation ground, ritual bathing of the chief mourner during the cremation, the ritual role of a life stone, the extinction of the fire “with offerings of milk, sugar and water,” subsequent periods of impurity, and the performance of the “*śhrāddh* or mind-rite,” suggests that the funeral rites of the Digambaras in nineteenth-century southern India were less jainized than lay funerals of the Jaina castes in northern India. See Sangave 1980:252; also Singh 1894:130.

<sup>164</sup> One amongst numerous reasons given in Vedic and post-Vedic texts is to ease the pain of the deceased, *preta*, and to feed it. See UK 24.12 summarized by Abegg 1921:22, GPS<sub>1–2</sub> 10.65–66.

<sup>165</sup> According to Brahma Purāṇa 221.151, referred to by Dange IV 1989:553, “[a]ll normal activities should be performed only after the collection of the bones.” On the numerous ritual variants mentioned in the Vedic texts, see Donner 1870:11; Caland 1888, 1896; Kane 1941/1953. See also GPS<sub>1–2</sub> 10 and UK 24.15 summarized by Abegg 1921:22.

the bones of the feet, and placing them into a jar, *asthi-kumbha*, representing the new body to be recreated in heaven<sup>166</sup> in order to ritually “liberate the deceased from the state of death,”<sup>167</sup> and keeping or burying the jar at a suitable place nearby, to be unearthed and re-buried in close proximity or thrown into a river a few days later (according to AP 4.26 to make sure that the deceased will remain in *brahma-loka* forever).<sup>168</sup> Before the cremation, as described in classical Vedic literature, invariably precious stones, gold or silver are put into the orifices of deceased mendicants, both to prevent evil spirits from entering the corpse and as an expression of personal admiration. The desire to find those “*cintāmaṇis*” amongst the mortal remains valorizes the relics and gives an additional impetus to the great rush after the cremation of famous mendicants to secure some relics for private use.<sup>169</sup>

### Structure of Mortuary Rituals for Mendicants

Apart from the non-involvement of Brahmins, common Jaina lay funerals outwardly differ only in details from common “Hindu” practices. Funerals for mendicants, however, are somewhat more elaborate and visibly different from common lay funerals, reflecting the elevated religious status of the deceased. The standard mortuary rites for a Jaina ascetic today comprise two distinct types of rituals that are performed only once before and after death:<sup>170</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Müller 1992:27 on AP 4.22; Monier-Williams 1891:300. Waldschmidt 1948:345 n. 157a explains descriptions of similar practices at the time of the cremation of the Buddha with reference to late Vedic precedents.

<sup>167</sup> “Ich werde das Sammeln der Knochen vollziehen, um den Toten N. N. aus dem *gotra* N. N. vom Totendasein zu erlösen” (AP 4.22, translated by Müller 1992:139).

<sup>168</sup> “Der, dessen Knochen, richtig ausgeführt, in das Wasser der Gāṅga geworfen werden, wird nie mehr aus dem *brahma-loka* wiedergeboren werden” (AP 4.26, translated by Müller 1992:143, cf. 145). Similarly GPS 10.84, also cited by Monier-Williams 1891:300f.

<sup>169</sup> See Babb 1996:120–22 and Dundas 2000:237f. on the “wish-fulfilling jewel” in the ashes of Jinacandra Sūri “Maṇidhārī” (1140–1166). On the association of bone relics with treasures in Buddhism, see Tambiah 1984:109; Martin 1994:281ff.; Trainor 1997:119f.; Strong 2004a:117; Ruppert 2000:91 ff.; Faure 2004:95ff.

<sup>170</sup> The distinction between *Todten-* and *Bestattungsriten* is Caland’s (1896). But in the present article “death rituals” are differently defined as pre-mortem rites, and

- (I) Death rituals
- (II) Funeral rituals

In the case of famous *ācāryas* or ascetics, one or two additional types of ritual are observed periodically, preferably, but not necessarily, at the site of cremation:

- (III) Commemorative rituals
- (IV) Rites of worship<sup>171</sup>

This analytical structure of broadly four types of rituals connected with the death of a prominent Jaina monk or nun is characterized by decreasing scriptural regulation and involvement of mendicants: Death rituals for mendicants, *saṃlekhanā*, for which no Vedic or Buddhist parallels exist, are described in detail in the Āgamas and their commentaries.<sup>172</sup> But only selected aspects of funeral rituals, cremation and post-funeral rites are depicted in mythological form.<sup>173</sup> Rites of commemoration and worship are unscripted and generally performed individually without mendicant participation.<sup>174</sup> In contrast to the death and funeral rituals of a particular saint, commemoration can be

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“funeral rituals” as post-mortem rituals dealing in particular with the mortal remains. See also footnote 113.

<sup>171</sup>) Only this type is particularly related with *samādhis*. Schopen’s 1992/1997:234, n. 63 suggestion that in Buddhism funeral ceremonies and relic cults are conceived as “fundamentally different forms of religious behaviour” seems to hold for the Jaina case as well, but neglects the Vedic heritage still informing the integral sequence of these rites.

<sup>172</sup>) For Jaina death rituals, see von Kamptz 1929 and Settar 1989, 1990.

<sup>173</sup>) See Schopen 1989/1997:91 on the conundrum of “the complete absence of rules specifically concerned with *stūpas* or *cetiya*s” in the Pāli Vinaya texts, which he suspects to have been “intentionally written out.” Langer 2007:89 also notes “the total lack of prescriptive, ritual literature in Theravāda Buddhism” except for scarce information “scattered in a variety of texts, hidden in stories and commentaries.” She suggests — inspired by an observation by Gombrich that *stūpa* construction became popular in North India only after the texts had been written down — that, at least in Śrī Laṅkā, the bodies of ordinary monks might have been simply discarded, rather than cremated (ibid.:113–5).

<sup>174</sup>) On historical changes from ritual *śrāddha* to “mere commemoration” in nineteenth-century Hindu reform movements, under the impact of colonialism, see Bayly 1981:179–85.

performed indefinitely and is therefore not part of the funeral rituals as such. Acts of worship in the widest sense are also performed during the pre-mortem existence of the deceased in a variety of forms, and are therefore to be distinguished from rites of commemoration.

In the English language the word “commemoration” includes a number of different religious practices that, while clearly distinguished in Jaina texts, are to some extent indistinguishable in practice: commemoration, *smṛtijñāna*, homage, *śraddhāñjali*, and worship, *pūjā*. *Smṛtijñāna* in the narrow sense can refer to the act of remembering a person recently deceased, as in the context of a commemorative meeting, *smaraṇotsava*, or homage. Accordingly, the annually commemorated days of death of the founders of specific sectarian traditions serve as reference points for sectarian calendars, following the example of the denominational Jaina calendars based on the conventional death days of Mahāvira in the Digambara and Śvetāmbara traditions. The English word commemoration can also refer, in a more abstract sense, to the recollection of the qualities or sayings of a long deceased person for the purpose of imitation. Only in this latter sense can the worship of a Jaina saint be described as an act of commemoration. Though within the Jaina tradition, rites of commemoration of doctrinally valued qualities of an exemplary saint are explicitly distinguished from rites of material empowerment through the difference of intentional orientation,<sup>175</sup> the rites of worship of famous saints inevitably combine both. Both commemoration and empowerment are oriented towards wish-fulfillment, though they differ in the specific nature of the wish and the either internal or external source of power that is addressed. Jaina rites of worship of deceased saints are not, strictly speaking, mortuary rites, nor of course are they ancestor rituals or purely symbolical rites of worship such as those directed to the Jinas. However, they are specifically connected with sites of cremation marked by funeral shrines that are believed to be visited on the death anniversaries by the deceased mendicant, now reborn as a god, along with attendant deities. The currently popular construction of funeral monuments at places such as the Mṛgāvātī Samādhi Mandira attracts attention, promotes cultic activity and thus enhances the public appeal of a sectarian

<sup>175</sup> See Tambiah 1984:203, 335 for this distinction.



tradition. The intention to encourage rites of commemoration at *samādhis* through *stotras* and *japa* meditation is evident in the brief outlines of recommended forms of homage in the form of leaflets and signposts *in situ* that rarely find their way into the official sectarian ritual manuals. Rites of empowerment, whether through the essential transfer of energy through touch (in addition to the mere presence at a *samādhi*) or through rites of worship, *pūjā*, are, however, officially discouraged for different reasons in the iconic and anti-iconic traditions.

### Contemporary Funeral Rituals for Mendicants

From an analytical point of view, contemporary funeral rituals for Jaina ascetics can be divided in three parts.<sup>176</sup> The first part, the

<sup>176</sup> In his discussion of the link between the funeral rites and the distribution of a deceased monk's property "in harmony with, classical Hindu laws or Dharmaśāstric conventions governing inheritance," Schopen 1992/1997:214 discussed five principal ritual elements of the monastic funerals depicted in the Cīvara-vastu and the Vinaya-kṣudraka-vastu of the Buddhist Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya (amongst others, such as monks taking a post-funeral bath). Number five relates to post-funeral rites if indeed a *stūpa* for the deceased itself is referred to, which is unlikely (ibid.:234, n. 63). All of these practices have Jaina equivalents, which points to an ancient common monastic funerary culture (pp. 210f., 218), despite variations (points four and five are not scripted in the Āgamas but observable in contemporary practice even amongst Jaina mendicants: *antya darśana* and visit of a temple rather than a *stūpa*):

- Sounding of the gong (*gaṇḍī*) for the dead (announcing the death)
- Recitation of *dharma* (*tridaṇḍaka*)
- Removal of the body (*abhi-nirhāra*) and transportation to the funeral ground
- Worshipping the body (*śarīra-pūjā*)
- Worshipping the *stūpa* or *caitya* (of the Buddha). (ibid.:208ff.)

According to Schopen 1994a/2004:290–4, the somewhat ambiguous term *śarīra-pūjā*, which earlier writers understood as referring to relic worship, signifies "the ritual handling or preparation of the body prior to cremation, though sometimes it seems to include the latter" (ibid.:290). If this is so, then from a pragmatic point of view the sequence poses a problem, since cleansing of the body and other basic preparations invariably precede its removal, whatever else is done to the body afterwards. A *śarīra-abhiṣeka*, on the other hand, can be performed at the cremation ground, as it is today at funerals of Digambara mendicants. On the basis of his sources, Schopen 1992/1997:221 concludes that "the funeral of a local monk was an exclusively monastic affair where participation was limited to monks and monks alone." However, the

“monastic funeral” strictly speaking, is performed exclusively by ascetics according to canonical paradigms, and parts two and three, the cremation and the disposal of the remains, exclusively by householders according to custom.

- (A) Disposal of the corpse
  - (a) Fasting, non-study, meditation
  - (b) Changing the clothes of the deceased
  - (c) Abandoning the corpse
  - (d) Meditation
- (B) Cremation
  - (a) Veneration of the corpse
  - (b) Funeral procession
  - (b) Cremation
- (C) Disposal of the bone relics<sup>177</sup>
  - (a) Collection of the bone relics
  - (b) Discarding of the bone relics
  - (c) Stūpa construction (post-funeral)

The principal ritual acts under the three main headings, whether scripted or unscripted, are nowadays shared by all Jaina traditions, with some exceptions. Most of them are, in one way or another, traceable to canonical sources.<sup>178</sup> Yet, an outline of the tripartite structure as a whole cannot be found in any single text. This should not be seen

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cremation itself is not mentioned at all in the texts. This part of the procedures, one must assume, was performed by householders as in the Jaina case, if it was performed at all. The erection of relic *stūpas* is also seen in the Jaina *ĀvN1* 206 as a practice that is separate from the funeral itself.

<sup>177</sup> Nowadays, Sanskrit terms are used to designate these ritual types. Discarding the corpse is usually called *visarjana* rather than *nīharaṇa* (S. *nirharāṇa*), the technical term in the scriptures. Brāhmaṇical terms such as *dāha saṃskāra* are used to designate the cremation, as well as the collection of the charred bones or *asthi-saṃcayana*. The charred bones or *aṭṭhi-jhāma* (S. *asthi-dhyāma*) remaining after cremation are simply described as bones or *aṭṭhis* (S. *asthi* or *haḍḍī*).

<sup>178</sup> The principal ritual acts performed today by mendicants in connection with the disposal of the corpse are all mentioned in the Prakrit scriptures: (1) Fasting, *cauttha-bhatta*, non-study, *asajjhāya*, and meditation, *jhāṇa*, (2) changing the clothes of the deceased, *vattha pariyaṭṭha*, (3) abandoning the corpse, *nīharaṇa*, the key ritual, and (4) meditation, *cauvisatthava kāussaga*. For details, see Flügel in press a.

as a flaw: rather, it reflects an important quality of social and ritual rules in general, one that gives them flexibility and secures their ability to function as relatively stable social forms. Ritual texts usually can and do not exhaustively prescribe concrete rituals for all contexts. These can only be constructed by ritualists on the basis of practical knowledge, often by combining paradigms from diverse texts or customs, as shown for Brāhmaṇical and Jaina contexts by Müller (1992:8f., 19) and Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994:31–6). The composite structure of contemporary Jaina monastic funerals reflects both the strict separation between mendicants and laity and the historical development of Jaina funerary rites.<sup>179</sup> Yet, if necessary, Jaina mendicants can still proceed according to ancient custom by simply discarding the corpse on suitable ground without relying on householders performing cremations or other further rites.

### History of Jaina Funeral Rituals

How did this structure emerge? According to Āvaśyaka Nirvyukti (ĀvN<sub>1</sub>) 206, a middle- or late-canonical text,<sup>180</sup> Rṣabha, the mythical first king and first *tirthaṅkara* of Jaina universal history who created culture, crafts and social forms, also invented the first rites of cremation and post-cremation rites for his mother Marudevī.<sup>181</sup> According to Śvetāmbara mythology, she was the first person to attain liberation in the present regressive time-cycle.<sup>182</sup> Listed among the forty cultural elements that Rṣabha is said to have introduced are: 35. veneration of the corpse, *mṛtaka-pūjā*; 36. cremation, *dhyāpanā*; 37. *stūpa* construction; 38. utterances for mourning and commemorating the dead, *śabda*.<sup>183</sup> Relics are not mentioned. Subsequent mythological texts of

<sup>179</sup>) On Buddhist parallels, i.e., the segmentation and development of early Buddhist mortuary rites for monks, see Schopen 1992/1997:210f., 234, n. 63.

<sup>180</sup>) Only the Mūrtipūjaka tradition grants the ĀvN canonical status.

<sup>181</sup>) As stated by Mūlabhāṣya Gāthās No. 26–27, ĀvN<sub>1</sub> p. 133.

<sup>182</sup>) See the passages with commentaries and parallels discussed by Balbir 1993:132, 170, 187; ĀvN 344, 1023, 1320cd; and Jaini's 2003:6f. extensive discussion of ĀvN 1023 and 1320.

<sup>183</sup>) The last six of the forty cultural elements listed in form of keywords in the old

the Śvetāmbara tradition present the first funeral rituals as creations intended only for monks and householders who experienced salvation (Marudevī was not a nun), rather than as variants of royal funerals as in the Buddhist Mahāparinibbāna Sutta. *Stūpa* construction and relic veneration are only ever mentioned in connection with the Jinas. The classical Śvetāmbara form of the myth of Marudevī in Hemacandra's TŚPC tells us that the first funeral rites were performed for Marudevī after her simultaneous accomplishment of omniscience and liberation caused by the first sight of her son Rṣabha in his splendor as a Tirthaṅkara:

She was the first person to attain mokṣa in this avasarpinī. The gods deposited her body in the ocean of milk after performing rites. From that time funeral rites existed among the people. Whatever the great do, that becomes a custom. (TŚPC 3.448–534, translated by Johnson 1931 I:197)

According to ĀvN<sub>1</sub> 366 and 435, echoed in TŚPC 6.459–643 with added descriptions of *stūpa* construction and relic worship, Rṣabha himself was also cremated. Deo (1956:322) thus speculated that “this might have been the general practice followed in the case of other monks also.” Neither early nor modern Jaina literature, however, contains prescriptions for the presently observable combined practices of cremation, collecting bone relics, and erecting relic *stūpas* for famous ascetics, except in this coded, mythological form. Nor is there unambiguous early epigraphical or archaeological evidence of Jaina funerary practices. According to current knowledge, limited prescriptions appear only in two rather exceptional Sanskrit texts of the Kharatara Gaccha (ĀD and SŚ) and one Digambara text (T) from the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, which are not referred to in ritual practice.

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*śloka* metre: *maḍaya-pūaṇā* <sup>35</sup> *jhāvaṇā* <sup>36</sup> *thūbha* <sup>37</sup> *sadde* <sup>38</sup> *a*, *chelāvaṇaya* <sup>39</sup> *pucchaṇā* <sup>40</sup> || ĀvN<sub>1</sub> 206 ||. In her analysis of this list of forty items and the related verses of the ĀvC and of Saṅghadāsa Vasudevahiṇḍi, Mette 1973:8f. considers only the first three, while mentioning the relevant commentaries. The funeral rites are further explained in the Mūlabhāṣya Gāthās No. 26–27 (ĀvN<sub>1</sub> p. 133). I am indebted to Professor Bansidhar Bhatt (Letter 9.4.2009) for pointing me to these passages, which he regards as late canonical interpolations. For further references, see Balbir 1993:131.

Remarkably, the common structure of the cremation and post-funeral rites for the Jinas enacted by the gods in Jaina mythology and by Jaina laity for their special dead today, broadly corresponds to the structure of the Brāhmaṇical funeral rituals outlined in late Vedic texts, especially the Taittirīya Sūtras, which Caland (1896:xii–xiii) analyzed under four main headings:

- (1) Cremation (*upoṣaṇam*)
- (2) Collection of the charred bones (*asthi-saṃcayana*)
- (3) Erection of a monument (*śmaśāna-citi, loṣṭa-citi*)
- (4) Expiation (*śāntikarman*)<sup>184</sup>

Neither Jaina texts nor ritualists explicitly refer to any of the four stages outlined in the Brāhmaṇical texts. Only death rituals and ritual procedures preceding the disposal of the dead by the mendicants, which are of course missing in the Brāhmaṇical literature, are described in detail in the scriptures. However, in ritual practice Vedic terms such as *dāha saṃskāra* and *asthi-saṃcayana* are invariably used to designate the main stages of the funeral rituals.

Because of their outward similarity to Vedic practices, the second and third parts of the tripartite funeral for a Jaina ascetic are often regarded as “Hindu” customs, incorporated into Jaina culture through processes of “pseudo-hinduisation” or “jinisation” / “jainisation.”<sup>185</sup> Yet, few parallels with the current mortuary rites of Jaina ascetics, as a whole, can be found in contemporary Hinduism. For Jaina ascetics, as for Buddhist monks and Hindu laity, cremation is now customary. Hindu *yogīs*<sup>186</sup> and *saṃnyāsins*, by contrast, are generally not cremated,

<sup>184</sup>) In Vedic texts, the cremation is called *upoṣaṇam* or *daha* (Caland 1896: § 53:99). Although sometimes listed before the burial of the relics, the expiation usually takes place at the end of the funeral, i.e., after the voluntary (“facultative”) burial of the remains under a funeral monument (ibid.:xiii, § 61:113) which is called either *śmaśāna-citi*, *loṣṭa-citi*, *nidhānam*, depositing, or *pitṛmedha*, sacrifice for the fathers: “die Schichtung der Leichenstätte’, ‘die Lehmklumpenschichtung’, ‘das Niederlegen’ oder auch ‘das Väteropfer’” (ibid.:§ 72:130f.). Manu<sub>1</sub> 4.46 also mentions “a mound piled up for the dead.”

<sup>185</sup>) Glasenapp 1926:340, 345, Alsdorf 1936:120; and Jaini 1979:297f., 304. See also Williams 1963:xx, xxiii on “hinduisation.”

<sup>186</sup>) De Marco 1987:224, and others.

but are buried or immersed, because ritually they already swallowed their own ashes during their initiation,<sup>187</sup> and no post-funerary rituals are performed.<sup>188</sup> Though the collection of mortal remains is still generally performed after the cremation of common Hindus (and Jains), as in Vedic times, nowadays they are rarely (re-)buried.<sup>189</sup> Instead, they are discarded in large rivers such as the Ganges. Both in Vedic and post- / non-Vedic contexts, mortuary shrines are only erected for extraordinary (male) individuals, such as royalty or religious or political leaders of influence as, for instance, for Mahātmā Gāndhī in modern times.<sup>190</sup>

Kane (1941/1953:255, 182ff.) stressed that this late Vedic pattern as a whole, if ever practiced widely, is not reflected in current “Hindu” custom anymore; and Müller (1992:10f.) pointed to many changes in the history of Brāhmaṇical funeral rituals, in particular the late Vedic addition of the *śrāddha* and *sapīṇḍīkaraṇa* rituals,<sup>191</sup> separately described by Caland (1888:22–32) under the label “ancestor ritual” following the division of the Vedic scriptures, and the omission, rearrangement and condensation of rites. For unknown reasons, the construction of

<sup>187</sup> Caland 1896:§ 50:93–5; Pandey 1969/1993:271f.; Carstairs 1983:233; Parry 1994:184, and others. Although Kane 1941/1953:229, as well, found that in accordance with the ancient Brāhmaṇical scriptures “[a] yati (sannyāsin) was and is even now buried,” the evidence on Hindu ascetic orders collected by Singh 1894:90–7 indicates that, in the nineteenth century, the vegetarian Vaiṣṇava ascetics tended to be cremated while the meat-eating Śivaite ascetics tended to be buried. The practice of erecting *samādhi* “tombs” was only recorded for the Jogīs (ibid.:92). See also Bayly 1981:168, who also reports that Kabīr-panthīs preferred burial.

<sup>188</sup> Pandey 1969/1993:271.

<sup>189</sup> Müller 1992:23 noted the absence of contemporary evidence of the practice of unearthing buried relics for either reburial or immersion, described in AP 4.26 with reference to RV 10.18, despite the fact that the custom of burying relics apparently continues in contemporary Hinduism, according to his informant. Monier-Williams 1891:284f., 302 witnessed a ceremonial gathering and burial of the bones of a low caste woman “which had many features in common with the ancient rite.”

<sup>190</sup> See <http://www.euronews.net/2010/01/30/gandhi-s-ashes-poured-into-indian-ocean/>.

<sup>191</sup> The reasons are unknown. For informed speculations, see Oldenberg 1894/1917:555–63; Butzenberger 1996:57, n. 44, pp. 72, 77, 1998:3, n. 6; Oberlies 1998:300, 465, n. 57 with reference to Caland 1893:176–81. For recent changes in the practices informed by the purāṇic model, see also the study of Bayly 1981.

bone relic shrines, *stūpas*, is generally not performed anymore amongst contemporary “Hindus,” though tombs are sometimes erected over the burial sites of ascetics by certain sectarian traditions and for kings or politicians.<sup>192</sup> Today, cremation and post-cremation practices that are comparable to the structure identified by Caland are predominately manifest in the Jaina context and in Buddhist traditions outside India,<sup>193</sup> which evidently had no impact on Jaina practices. In contrast to contemporary Buddhist customs,<sup>194</sup> there is usually no direct involvement of Jaina mendicants in monastic or lay cremations or post-cremation rituals, though cremations of mendicants are performed by laity according to the instructions by leading monks.

The conclusion seems inevitable that the composite tripartite structure of the Jaina monastic funeral emerged by combining exclusively Jaina monastic funerary practices, that is, the rituals associated with the disposal of the corpse, *nīharaṇa* (S. *nirharāṇa*), with the established structural form of classical Vedic funerary practices, emptied of all doctrinal content and ceremonial detail, including the facultative erection of relic monuments for the special dead,<sup>195</sup> while introducing

<sup>192)</sup> See Briggs 1938/2001:39–43 on *samādhis* of Kānphaṭa Yogīs; and Parry 1982:96f. on *samādhis* of Kina Rām Aghorīs. On the difference between tomb and *stūpa*, see Barua 1926.

<sup>193)</sup> See in particular the work of Keyes 1975, 1980, 1982; and Langer 2007.

<sup>194)</sup> On contemporary monastic funerals in Buddhist Śrī Laṅkā, for instance, see Gombrich 1971/1991:320; and Langer 2007:66–9.

<sup>195)</sup> Hillebrandt’s 1897:§ 55–57:90–2, 1911:479 summary of Vedic (“Hindu”) practices is worth recalling:

Over the remains is erected the monument, which conforms to a definitely prescribed plan, and in which the present writer sees the precursor of the *stūpa* of later days. When the structure has reached a certain height, food for the dead is walled in. After its completion, the *śmaśāna* is covered with earth, and water is poured over it from pitchers which it is the custom to destroy, or it is bestrewn with *avakā*-plants and *kuśa*-grass.

Information on the ritual function of funerary monuments in the Vedic period is extremely rare and sketchy. Hillebrandt 1897:§ 55–57:86f. points to the “extraordinary” description in ĀGS 1.12 of a *caitya-vandana*, veneration of the funeral shrine, erected in honor of teachers or prophets, either with a personal offering or *bali* in front of the sacrificial fire, or by sending a *piṇḍa* to be offered with a messenger, who

more and more changes and reinterpretations that led to a progressive jainisation and eventual codification, for Jaina laity only, of those originally Vedic practices, which themselves were further elaborated and transformed as evident in the Hindu Epics and Purāṇas.

The continuing influence of this ancient Brāhmaṇical ritual paradigm, even after the emergence of the current “Hindu” custom of immersing the charred bone relics after cremation, has, it seems, not been sufficiently appreciated in the academic literature to date. Two of the exceptions are Caland’s (1896) and Waldschmidt’s (1944–48) occasional comparisons of late Vedic prescriptions with the accounts of the funeral of the Buddha. The latter’s approach was elaborated by Bareau (1971, 1975), whose view that the Buddha’s funeral was performed according prevailing Brāhmaṇical custom has been challenged by Bronkhorst (2009:17) who inferred on the basis of the Mahā-parinibbāna Sutta the existence of pre-brāhmaṇic customs in “Greater Magadha” of preserving “non cremated, entombed human corpse[s]” in *stūpas*, which in his view were initially continued in early Buddhism, Jainism and Ājīvikism (ibid.:13), but later replaced by Brāhmaṇised cremation rites.<sup>196</sup> The question why “Magadhan religions” should have been interested in preserving the corpse as long as possible if indeed “karmic retribution” (Bronkhorst 2007:71) was the cornerstone of their beliefs is not addressed. There is presently no evidence for practices of this kind or for the existence of early Jaina or Ājīvika

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receives another *pinḍa* himself. The commentator Narāyaṇa interprets this as a wish-fulfilling sacrifice. In a footnote to his translation of ĀGS, Oldenberg 1886:178, n. 1 comments: “I do not know anything that supports this statement as to the meaning of *kaitya*.”

<sup>196</sup> Brāhmaṇical elements in the surviving depictions of the Buddha’s funeral are uncontroversial, but the reasons for wrapping the corpse of the Buddha and putting it into a tub filled with oil are unclear. While Waldschmidt 1948:264 argues that it was done for preservation until cremation, Bareau 1971:43 and Strong 2004a:104, cf. 106, n. 21 point out that it played a role in procuring good relics. Bronkhorst 2009:17 suspects that the body was preserved in oil “to provide enough time to build the *stūpa*,” and that the episode of the cremation was later interpolated under Brāhmaṇical cultural influence. Yet, even in this scenario it remains unclear why the body was not preserved in oil immediately, and why no description of the “initial account of the entombment” survived. On the widespread practice of mummification preceding cremation across cultures, for different reasons, see Levin 1930:30; Pandey 1969/1993:24; Sharf 1992:4f., and others.



practices of inhumation.<sup>197</sup> But there is some evidence in the *R̥gveda* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, etc., collected by Caland (1896:§ 42, pp. 69f., 87, n. 327), Levin (1930 I:31, III:65f.), Kane (1941/1953:233f.), and others, for the complementarity of the practices of preservation and cremation of the corpses of kings or other special dead, and the theoretical discussion by Hertz (1907/1960:41–3, 125, n. 96).<sup>198</sup>

<sup>197</sup> Building on Waldschmidt's 1944–48:263f. and Bareau's 1971:314–20 ideas on the problem of understanding the use of an oil-filled tub, *tela-doṇī*, to preserve the Buddha's body before his cremation to prevent decomposition, Bronkhorst 2009:15ff. offered a new, speculative, interpretation of the "original" custom of inhumation of the body of the deceased in the pre-brāhmaṇicized regions of eastern India. He argued that the continuing practice of burial of Hindu ascetics derives from this tradition, as well as the "original" Buddhist, Jaina and Ājīvika practices of preservation of the body, which were later transformed under the influence of the Brāhmaṇical practice of cremation (ibid.:13). Five reasons, at least, speak against this hypothesis: (1) There is no evidence for Jaina and Ājīvika burial practices in early India. (2) Possible reasons for the preservation and inhumation of the body are not explored. (3) No explanation is offered for the putative transformation of the "original" practice of inhumation into the practice of post-funeral preservation of relics in the Buddhist tradition, and for the discontinuation of the same practice in the Brāhmaṇical tradition. (4) Alternative explanations, based on the work of Caland 1896, by Waldschmidt 1948:264 and Bareau 1971:314ff. are rejected because they would disagree with the Greater Magadha hypothesis (Bronkhorst 2009:17). (5) The fact that preservation of the entire body before and during the cremation is a requirement of the classical Vedic funeral, as is the collection and burial of the relics after cremation, is not considered. See also footnote 165 in the present text. However, for the appellation "O *Māgadhbā*!" in Bhagavatī (Viṃ) II.1.23.fol.34 (his ms.) see A. Weber 1867:250.

<sup>198</sup> Tiwari 1979:23f., and Patil 1982:56 point to the exceptional and short-lived character of the practices described in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. Yet, like Das 1969–70:61–7 and others before him, Patil 1982:58 found evidence both in the late Vedic and Buddhist texts and at Buddhist sites in northern India from the first century BCE for the custom of erecting memorial pillars or hero-stones over the charred bones and ashes which were "collected and then deposited or buried in more or less the same manner as in a burial," which he argued, "had its origins in the Buddhist practice of relic worship, which, in its turn, was derived from the funeral practices of the easterners or the Asuras of the Vedic texts" (p. 58). In his view, "Modern practices of the disposal and care of the dead retain evident traces of the primitive beliefs and practices so that memorials in honour of the dead such as tombs, grave-stones or tablets, cenotaphs, *samādhis* or *vṛndāvans* are being raised over the dead bodies, their relics or ashes" (p. 47). At the same time, Patil 1982:58, and Tambiah 1984:127, stress the difference between relics of Buddhist ascetics (or commoners) and of martial heroes who died a "bloody death."

The most likely sources of the structure of the funerary practices depicted in ancient Jaina narrative literature and of contemporary Jaina practices of cremation, collecting relics and constructing relic *stūpas*, are thus the late Vedic funeral rites outlined in Dharma- and Gṛhyasūtra texts such as the Taittirīya Sūtras, analyzed by Caland (1896), which are preserved even today in a jainized form.<sup>199</sup> The prevalent view, echoed by Bronkhorst (2007:273f.), that an increasing concern with ritual purity prevented the development of a relic cult in the Brāhmaṇical tradition diverts attention from the principal reason for the continuing practice of collecting and ritually discarding bone relics post cremation, i.e., the outward perpetuation of the Vedic belief in the ritual reconstitution of the body of the deceased in an ancestral world.<sup>200</sup> This popular view, which is incompatible with karman theory, continues to inform funerary practices throughout the Subcontinent (Knipe 1977:112), including the ritual logic and symbolism of Jaina monastic funerals, which simulate or re-enact the journey of the soul to heaven, a journey that, according to Jaina doctrine and monastic ritual, happened already at the point of death. Long before colonialism (cf. Bayly 1981:156), jainization transformed the Vedic cremation from a “ritual” into a “ceremony.”<sup>201</sup>

In sum, despite its outward similarity with structures and elements of Brāhmaṇical (and brāhmaṇicized<sup>202</sup> Buddhist) funeral rites, the tripar-

<sup>199</sup>) Caland 1896:IV–VII, XIII focused mainly on the *pitṛmedhasūtra*’s of the “younger schools” of the Taittirīya tradition: Bhāradvāja, Āpastambha, Hiranyakeśin, rather than of the older Baudhāyana (which is not included in Bühler’s “rohe Inhaltsangabe” in the Sacred Books of the East). The *pratīkas* of the sayings cited at the funerals of the tradition refer all to the Taittirīya-Āraṇyaka. An overview of the Vedic mortuary rites is offered in Hillebrandt 1897:§§ 55–57:86–97. See footnote 193.

<sup>200</sup>) A. Weber 1855:238/1868:21f., 25f. in his comments on the mortuary rites depicted in ŚB 4.6.1.1, 11.1.8.6, 12.8.3.31 and 11.6.3.11 = 14.6.9.28 concluded that the prescribed collection of the relics after cremation is intrinsically connected with the intention to recreate the body of the deceased in its entirety in heaven as a form of personal immortality, a practice which is only “inconsequentially” continued in Buddhist relic worship.

<sup>201</sup>) For the argument that “the main social function of the dualist Jain doctrine was to contribute to a relative de-substantialisation of popular preconceptions” see Flügel 1995–6:163.

<sup>202</sup>) Or rather: “buddhicized” Brāhmaṇical rites. See Waldschmidt 1948:263f.; Schopen 1992/1997:214, 219.

tite monastic funeral as an ensemble is unique to Jaina culture. Despite some overlap, the form and meaning of specific rituals such as changing the clothes and symbolically bathing the corpse before the cremation tend to be entirely different. Monastic death and funeral rituals and rites of disposal including rites of last sight, *antya darśana*, as well as in image-worshipping traditions, *guru pūjā*, are specifically Jaina (and Buddhist),<sup>203</sup> while post-funerary rites are less elaborated if not entirely missing: rites of expiation, for instance, or ancestor rituals, which are neither prescribed nor usually practiced by Jains after the cremation of an ascetic, though sometimes after the death of a lay person. Until recently, there was no evidence of bone relic preservation amongst Jains, which is still the exception rather than the rule. Even the mythical paradigms of the Śvetāmbara canon only refer to the relics of the Jinās, not to those of common mendicants. Nor are there any Jaina texts detailing rules for *stūpa* construction, which leaves ample space for creativity. On the contrary, Jaina karman theory discourages attachment to all material objects including mortal remains. Specifically Brāhmaṇic rituals are not practiced at all during Jaina mortuary rites, especially not acts of sacrificial violence, nor are Brahmins involved.

In view of the manifestly different rituals that are associated with the Jaina variants of the Vedic sequence of funeral rites, it may seem rash to assume that current Jain practices of cremation and disposal of the remains under funerary monuments of variable shape were originally Brāhmaṇical rituals that were at some stage reinterpreted and incorporated by the Jaina tradition, as in the case of Buddhist relic *stūpas* whose round shape is still widely accepted as evidence for their derivation from the round burial mounds, *śmaśāna*, mentioned in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (ŚB) 13.8.1–2.<sup>204</sup> There is as yet, however, no better explanation.

<sup>203</sup>) See footnote 174 on the Buddhist *śarīra-pūjā* which is also performed by monks.

<sup>204</sup>) Cf. Parpola 2002:310–12, 2004–5:53–5. See Schopen 1992/1997 for textual evidence of Buddhist monastic funerals that closely resemble Jaina monastic funerals. See footnotes 113 and 174.

## The Power of Relics

What conclusions can be drawn from these new findings on the contemporary Jaina cult of relic *stūpas*? Clearly, belief in the miraculous power of the bone relics of the special dead plays an important role in Jaina culture, albeit a subordinate one. After cremation, the relics of prominent mendicants are collected, distributed and sometimes enshrined in opulent funerary monuments. At the same time, the practice of relic worship is denounced and its efficacy denied or rationalized. Viy<sub>1</sub> 10.5.a ff. (502b ff.) has the story of the demigod Camara, dwelling in the uppermost region of the underworld, who in his palace worships the relics of the Jinās in a deluded search for power, *iddhi*, which after all prevents him from enjoying sexual pleasures with his forty thousand Asurakumārī wives who worship the relics as well. JĀĀ 442, 516 and Rāy<sub>1</sub> 200g (Rāy<sub>2</sub> 351) describe, in almost identical words, the worship, *accana*, of bone relics of the Jinās with scented water, incense and flower garlands by the god Sūriyābha, the reincarnated king Paesi, in his palace in the first heaven. Remarkably, Rāy<sub>1</sub> 186f. (Rāy<sub>2</sub> 275f.) does not merely promise worldly benefits, such as welfare, happiness and forgiveness, to the one who worships the relics of Tīrthaṅkaras, but also release from the cycle of rebirth — a fact that is downplayed by the modern Hindī translator and commentator of the text, the Sthānakavāsī monk Pravartaka Amar Muni (2002:184), who rendered the Prakrit word *nisseyasa*, salvation, as *kalyāṇa*, good fortune. Occasionally, the body secretions of Jaina ascetics are described as physical sources of power. But generally, *iddhis* and other special powers and qualities associated with relic worship are interpreted as the karmic fruits of good deeds in a former existence (Viy<sub>1</sub> 3.1.2a [169b]). The only source of personal power is good karman, resulting from the enactment and veneration of Jaina values, symbolized by images or relics of noble beings, as much as from charity, asceticism, religious work, good conduct or scriptural study, all mentioned in Rāy<sub>1</sub> 206 (Rāy<sub>2</sub> 665–7). According to the scriptures, the value of relics and body secretions of Jaina mendicants can be conceived in multiple ways: as crystallized forms of ascetic energy; as indexical symbols of the living presence of ascetics who are reborn in heaven; or as conventional symbols of Jaina ideals, the doctrinally favored variant. Whichever interpretation is preferred, because the bone relics of the

Jinas are considered worthy of worship by all gods (Rāy<sub>1</sub> 174 = Rāy<sub>2</sub> 240), they are perceived as objects of mimetic desire and can serve as a vehicles of legitimate authority and power. By implication, the same applies to exemplary Jaina monks and nuns. However, the worshipper could only expect to have it “both ways” (Cort 2001:200), that is, to accrue good karman and therefore material and soteriological gain at the same time, when relics are venerated as symbols rather than as powerful material objects. This subtle doctrinal point is not always appreciated in practice. Probably in order to discourage personalized cults of the dead,<sup>205</sup> the Jaina scriptures invite us to imagine the veneration of relics by the gods in heaven, but not here on earth. Yet, today the living bodies and bodily remains of unliberated mendicants are venerated in almost the same way as the relics of the Jinas in canonical mythology. Nevertheless, at most Jaina funerary monuments, such as the Mṛgāvātī Samādhi Mandira, worship by means of *pūjā* and *pradakṣiṇā*, which comes naturally in India, is actively discouraged. The presumed material power of relics can therefore only be transmitted through the devotee’s physical presence at the shrine and through touch of the *cabūtarā* or the *caraṇa pādukās*, etc.<sup>206</sup> No theology of merit making is associated with these practices, nor is there a notable official discourse about the pros and cons of the veneration of relic shrines, comparable to the vast literature on the equally controversial practice of image worship. Yet, in apocryphal writings and malicious gossip Sthānakavāsīs blame Mūrtipūjakas and Digambaras for the worship of lifeless objects, while often constructing and worshipping relic *stūpas*. Digambaras blame Śvetāmbaras for erecting *stūpas* and for spreading the myth of the veneration of the relics of the Jinas by the gods. But, a key text of the tradition, Jinasena’s Ādi Purāṇa, depicts the cremation of Tīrthaṅkara Rṣabha by the gods who share the ashes, *bhasma*, with humans. Other texts confirm that the (Digambara or) Yāpanīya Jaina *stūpa* in Mathurā was built by the gods. Early evidence also points to the possibility of some Digambara *nisidhis* doubling as relic shrines, while contemporary Digambaras construct relic shrines as well.

<sup>205</sup> See also Tambiah’s 1984:329 remarks on what Max Weber would have called Buddhist *Amtscharisma* (charisma of office)

<sup>206</sup> It is emphasized by the Śvetāmbara Terāpanthīs that a deceased *ācārya* should not be venerated as a god but instead be commemorated as a human being.

In the Jaina traditions, the preservation of relics, as sources of empowerment, under highly visible funerary cenotaphs is never done without the consent of the monastic authorities and usually at their request. Ceremonies of entombment, *asthi kalaśa kī sthāpanā*, however, are not widely announced and somewhat clandestinely performed early in the morning by small groups of officials (not least because precious stones are buried together with relics). There is no culture of trade or theft of relics. Following J. Assmann's (2000) terminology, the Jaina cult of relic *stūpas* can be said to belong to the domain of the Jaina "cultural unconscious." It is a disrespected and hidden practice at the periphery of the official tradition, which for doctrinal reasons cannot be instrumentalized for purposes of public religious display and therefore remains unregulated and freely at everyone's disposal.<sup>207</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

Is it possible to find general explanations for the widespread human belief in the miraculous power of relics and the socio-psychological efficacy of relic worship? Broadly speaking, three theoretical approaches have been proposed in academic discourses: (1) psychological theories, informed by causal theories of power, (2) sociological theories, informed by relational theories of power, and (3) fetish theories, combining causal and relational theories of power.

Among psychological approaches, there are three principal causal explanations for the power of relics: (a) those that connect them with magical, mythical or mystical thinking, associated with popular religion; (b) those that interpret them as the objectification of charisma; (c) and those that highlight the aesthetic effect of performative objects. A brief review of recent scholarship must suffice here.

The most popular explanation of relic worship linking it with a "primitive mentality" (Lévy-Bruhl 1922/1923) argues that it is predicated on "bad science." For Cassirer (1923–29 Vol. II:83f.), relic worship

<sup>207</sup> The "cultural unconscious" in this sense must be distinguished both from inferred processes of "unconscious thought" and "deep motivations" (Goonasekere 1986:7), and from spheres of value within the realm of ideology which are not systematically or only indirectly expressed (Laidlaw 1985:51f.) and in this sense "unconscious" (Cort 1990:60).

is a manifestation of *mythical thinking* predicated on a conception of causality which posits that each part literally embodies the indestructible whole to which it belongs. Hence, all phenomena are always and essentially incarnation.<sup>208</sup> As an example one may refer to theological views frequently reported from Catholic and Buddhist cultural contexts that relics of saints *are* the saints “continuing to live among men” (Geary 1986:176) and should thus be treated in the same ways as the living saints (Schopen 1987/1997:134). Since the denunciation of relic worship by Christian Protestant reformers, and due to the influential writings of M. Weber (1922/1972), such practices are still generally associated with popular “emotive” forms of religion rather than with “rational” soteriological doctrine, both by scholastics and theorists. This “two-tier model” was challenged, but not replaced, by P. Brown (1981) and subsequent scholarship.<sup>209</sup>

Mauss (1902–3/1972:63, 22) interprets *magical thought*, oriented towards wish-fulfillment, also as a pre-scientific conception of causality: a conventionally accepted synthetic judgment *a priori* related to the idea of an impersonal force whose effect is *sui generis* that can be invoked through ritual actions and objects. He argues that the “false images” of causal effects produced by magical judgments are found “only in public opinion... under the pressure of the needs of groups and individuals” (ibid.:155). Sociologically, Mauss concludes, “the magical value of persons or things results from the relative position they occupy within society or in relation to society” (ibid.:120f.).

With reference to the work of Mauss (1902–3, 1925) and M. Weber (1922/1972), Tambiah (1984:203, 336, 342) interprets relics as objectifications of the ritually transferred *mystical power* of charismatic individuals.<sup>210</sup> The quality and quantity of the objectified power, i.e., the

<sup>208</sup>) “In the hairs of a human being, in its nail cuttings, its clothes, in its footprints, the entire human being is still contained. Each trace which a human being leaves behind is taken as a real part of it, which can effect back on it as a totality” (Cassirer 1923–29 Vol. II:83f./1955:83).

<sup>209</sup>) For instance M. Weber 1922/1972; Obeyesekere 1966, 1985; Gombrich 1971/1991; Spiro 1970/1982 and, on the other hand, P. Brown 1981; Tambiah 1984; Schopen 1997.

<sup>210</sup>) On rites of transfer through metaphorical association (equation) of attributes, see Tambiah 1968:194: “The rite of transfer portrays a metaphorical use of language (verbal substitution) whereby an attribute is transferred to the recipient by means of a

relic's potential for "instrumental action" (ibid.:45), is determined by "a society's classified positions" (ibid.:339) in line with the culturally dominant hierarchy of values.<sup>211</sup> A variant of the theme of routinization of charisma is offered by Babb (1996:110), who argues that the *magical power* of a renowned Jaina ascetic "crystallizes into a *ritual effect*" by means of hagiography that serves as "a charter for a mortuary cult" which preserves the relationship between a specific saint and his/her followers "in the form of a pair of permanently available ritual roles: powerful monk and lay follower in need of assistance."

A third set of causal theories focuses on the *aesthetic effects* of socially recognized relics as "performative objects,"<sup>212</sup> that is, on processes of subjectification or consumption,<sup>213</sup> rather than on the processes of production of relics through ritual processes of objectification or through the metaphysical gaze projecting the presence of the deceased into the remains. Freedberg (1989:97) argues that the perceived power of relics and images does not derive from psychology, social structure or ritual but from their materiality and aesthetic form: "Effectiveness of function proceeds directly from effectiveness of form" (ibid.:439).<sup>214</sup> In response to Davis' (1998:17) question how "images are able to act as they do," R. L. Brown (1998a: 33) asks whether images or other representations of the Buddha derive their power from the worshippers or are intrinsically powerful.<sup>215</sup> His conclusion is twofold. Firstly,

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material symbol which is used metonymically as a transformer. Frazer would simply have described the procedure as a case of contagious magic. The technique gains its realism by clothing a metaphorical procedure in the operational or manipulative mode of practical action; it unites both concept and action, word and deed." See also Tambiah 1973/1985.

<sup>211</sup> Tambiah 1984:330, 204 acknowledges similarities between this analysis of *iddhi* and the Buddhist cosmological "doctrine of presence."

<sup>212</sup> For a glimpse of analogous Christian theological debates on sacramental causality, see Blankenhorn 2006.

<sup>213</sup> On objectification and subjectification in the theory of consumption, see Miller 1987.

<sup>214</sup> Following Freedberg, despite minor criticism, Faure 1998:781, 805 and Sharf 1999:85 argue that icons such as Buddhist *stūpas*, which are distinguished from other images through their constitutive physicality, become animated objects through subjective acts of projection, which leads them back, in one way or another, to the notion of *primitive mentality* (ibid.:89).

<sup>215</sup> Contrast this question with the older one: "whether it is the objects themselves



in Buddhist countries miracles are expected both of images and of the relics of the Buddha. Secondly, the source of the power of Buddha images is not derived from the Buddha's presence in his symbols, nor is it that crafty politicians or monks merely use them for instrumental ends. Rather, "their power to influence the people and the state stems most fundamentally from their ability to function as *objects* of power, rather than as portraits or symbols" (Brown 1998b:45).<sup>216</sup> Granoff (1998:89f.), by contrast, suggests a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic factors: "Any successful art object has some latent powers as its subject and can in some contexts function exactly like the real thing." She proposes that both rituals of consecration and the aesthetic quality of objects are significant.

The possible objection that relics are not objects of art in the same way as images can be met by referring to cremation or secondary burial as skillful methods for manufacturing relics. In his study of the relics of the Buddha, from "a Buddhist view of the nature of reality," Strong (2004a:115) makes precisely this point. He also argues against the prevalent view that relics are incarnations (ibid.:229): "Relics of the Buddha... are more spreaders and continuators of the Buddha's presence than incarnations of him... the Buddha's life story does not stop with his death, just as it does not begin with his birth." For him (ibid.:238), too, relics are performative objects which, like performative utterances, "do' things by virtue of their very nature, in the right ritual / cultural / emotional / religious environment." He stresses that Buddhist relics are "treated as a monk, but also could be identified with kingship and divinity." Like R. L. Brown, he talks about "actions" of relics and "things done." Yet, these are metaphorical expressions, reproduced from the emic repertoire.<sup>217</sup> Relics do not act: they only function. The now widely used term "performative object" mimics

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which effect material changes in some mysterious way, or whether it is some spiritual force which is either represented by or located in (but separate from) these objects" (Ellen 1988:215).

<sup>216</sup> Similarly Gimello 2004: 245 on Buddhist relics: "What about their power to generate rather than only to receive meaning?... I do not believe... that a sacred image or relic is simply a simulacrum, or merely the sum of its extrinsic socio-political implications."

<sup>217</sup> See Ellen 1988:223–6 for an analysis of further examples.

Austin's (1962/1975:6ff.) concept of the "performative utterance" while concealing the fundamental difference between action and function. However, the emphasis on the relic itself and its function as an object independent from the presumed continuing presence of its deceased creator are crucial observations which prepare the ground for a theoretical shift from causal to relational explanations of the power of relics and images of the dead.

Evidently, most causal explanations of the power of relics are tied to a metaphysics of presence, whether couched in religious or non-religious terms, and posit the formative influence of cultural categories created by a set of distinct cognitive processes.<sup>218</sup> Yet, I would argue, the cross-cultural recognition of the power of valued relics can only be comprehensively understood in terms of their function as media of communication and interaction within social systems. This has been sensed by scholars such as Geary (1978/1990, 1986), Tambiah (1984), Trainor (1997), Faure (1998, 2004) and Strong (2004a) whose pioneering investigations of relic cults in Christian and Buddhist contexts moved away from the earlier psychological theories towards an analysis of the specific social and cultural procedures for establishing the value of relics. Such approaches highlight the importance of narratives and the role of experts in political "tournaments" that endow relics with socio-cultural value and work against their commodification. Though their focus tends to be on politics, trade and theft of relics most modern analysts explain the resistance of relics towards commodification with reference to the social dominance of cultural templates and status hierarchies informing practices of validation (e.g. Taussig 1980/1986; Appadurai 1986; Bloch 1990). We are back to the study of mentalities. Sharf (1999:78) drew attention to the problem that such cultural functionalist approaches tend to presuppose rather than explain the power of relics within given social systems.<sup>219</sup> A general theory of the function of relics as symbolically generalized media of social interaction and communication, drawing on ideas of Marx (1867), Simmel

<sup>218</sup>) See *ibid.*:219 on "fetishization."

<sup>219</sup>) This is a general problem of Talcott Parsons' influential variant of structural functionalism which still informs this line of investigation. For a brief overview of post-Parsonian developments on generalized media, such as money, power, influence, value-commitment, truth or love, see Chernilo 2002.

(1900), Parsons (1963), Luhmann (1976) and Habermas (1980–1), who have altogether ignored the role of relics as social media, still remains a desideratum.

Relics do not have the capacity to act and to exercise power over others in the same way as living saints or political rulers. They function as repositories and transmitters of power in other ways. Like money, circulating as a symbol of value without having value itself, I would argue, relics condense energy in a passive way, but are perceived to be the source of the power, essentially social relationships, that they mobilize and represent.<sup>220</sup> Relics of renowned ascetics have the power to attract rather than to command. Though relics are usually hidden away and do not physically circulate much, their invisibility and relative immobility does not affect their efficacy as symbolic media of social communication and interaction. Historically, this power is derived from the perceived material continuity with a revered personality that is extended to the funeral monuments where relics are enshrined. The fact that valued *bona fide* relics can be divided and individually appropriated does not impact on their potential for social mobilization, which undesirable relics do not possess. As objects of mimetic desire,<sup>221</sup> they act as social catalysts, conditioning, focusing, and energizing collective energies and actions of individual human beings.<sup>222</sup> Their power does not merely derive from their position in the dominant cultural hierarchy of values which they represent. In my view, the power of desirable relics can, to a large extent, be

<sup>220</sup> On the analogy of power and money, and the link between the cultural, social, political, and economic systems in modern societies see Parsons 1963, and for a revised version of his theory of generalized media of communication: Luhmann 1976. For Luhmann 1975/1988:22 // 1979:121f., whose criticism of causal theories of power has informed the present literature review, the term power refers only to political power, and can be applied to relics only by analogy.

<sup>221</sup> See already Mauss 1902–3/1972:235: “It is because the result desired by everyone is expressed by everyone, that the means are considered apt to produce the effect.”

<sup>222</sup> For a definition and functional analysis of social catalysts, see Luhmann 1975/1979:11/114: “[T]he power of the power-possessor is not satisfactorily described as a cause. It can be compared rather with the complex function of a catalyst. Catalysts accelerate (or decelerate) the triggering-off of events; without themselves changing in the process, they cause changes in the ratio of effective connections (or probability) expected from chance connections between system and environment.”

understood as a variant of the general human tendency towards the anthropomorphization or fetishization of established media of social communication, which is a necessary correlate of their function, a phenomenon well documented in the sociological and anthropological literature.<sup>223</sup> Faure (1998:794) observed that a *stūpa* is “in more than one sense, an animated monument”: not only “because of the presence of relics that give it life” (in a metaphorical sense) but also “because of the procession of pilgrims that turns it into what Mus called a ‘cinetic’ monument.” From the second, functionalist rather than metaphysical, point of view, unexplored by Faure’s own “self-centred perspective” (ibid.:811), the power of relics is a consequence of the objectification not of subjective charisma but of a web of social relations whose energy is causally attributed to the relic as a placeholder for the role of the deceased. The relationship between subjects, that is, in the present case, mendicant and devotee, is turned into a relationship between subject and object, that is, devotee and relic. From a functional point of view, collective attributions of special powers to particular individuals or to their relics represent variant forms of fetishization of social media. Effectively, collective attributions themselves produce the perceived intrinsic power of recognized media that function as social catalysts.<sup>224</sup> However, while both ascetics and relics, in their roles as media of social interaction, can serve as means or ends of social power, relics can never generate or exercise instrumental power. Their power is predicated on the relational power of individuals that are endowed

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<sup>223</sup>) For fetish theories and analyses of the relationship between power, death and money, inspired by Marx’ 1867/1890 analysis of the value-form, see Taussig 1980/1986; Tambiah 1984:340; and Bloch 1990:177, who in his work on the Merina in Madagascar states “[t]he parallel to capital and money as understood in the work of Marx is... the tomb and the bodies of the dead for the Merina.” See also *infra* on the somewhat different but kindred approaches of Simmel 1900/1989; Parsons 1963; Luhmann 1975/1988 and Habermas 1980–1 on symbolically generalized media of communication.

<sup>224</sup>) Hobbes 1651/1985:150 already noted (though not with regard to relics) that “Reputation of power, is Power; because it draweth with it the adherence of those that need protection,” and that “The manifestation of the Value we set on one another, is that which is commonly called Honouring, and Dishonouring” (ibid.:152).

with extraordinary capabilities<sup>225</sup> demonstrated through exemplary acts that are socially recognized.<sup>226</sup>

Relic veneration appears to be a conundrum only if the power of relics is conceptualized in terms of a causal theory of power, i.e., in terms of the notion of a generalized individual capacity to act conceived as a personal possession. From this perspective, one must conclude that if the agent is dead, the capacity to act dies with him or her, unless the role has been filled by a place holder. Instrumental theories of power, often projected into insufficiently analyzed phenomena such as “magic,” have therefore been supplemented by theories of institutional power or cosmologically generalized conceptions of ultimate instrumental power (Tambiah 1984:330). Yet, relics are not venerated by decree or cultural norm, but because of personal attachment. The problem, how pieces of dead matter, a relic or an emblem, can exert influence and power, in an admittedly less specific way than the deceased individual, cannot be answered by institutional or culturalist theories of power either. A relic has no will. It can at best function as a catalyst and repository of power, in a manner akin to money. It can become powerful itself only if it is recognized as a tangible means of communication, and hence endowed with the ability of constituting emergent or auto-poetic social systems if and when it is brought into circulation as a symbolically generalized medium of communication.

The aspect of the power of relics that derives from their role as social catalysts can be easily understood and modeled with the help of J. L. Moreno’s (1934:266) elegant theory of the social unconscious which is predicated on the view of society as a spontaneous self-regulative network that is based on an emotional economy of contacts and processes of social gravitation and sociostasis. A network approach is useful for the analysis of relic worship because it focuses not on the realm of formal institutions, social positions and official procedures of authorization, but on the bedrock of social life, the undercurrent of

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<sup>225</sup> “Ascetics have power, relics don’t” (H. L. Jain, personal communication, Ludhiyānā 26.12.2009).

<sup>226</sup> “The generalized symbols of the code, the duties and insignia of office, ideologies and conditions of legitimation serve to help the process of articulation, but the communication process itself only crystallizes motives when power is being exercised” (Luhmann 1975/1979:21/120).

interpersonal psychogeographical links that runs through and cuts across formal structures. For Moreno (1947:80) the smallest social unit, the “social atom,” is not the individual but “the individual *and* the people (near or distant) to whom he is emotionally related at the time.”<sup>227</sup> Social life is to a large extent constituted by fluctuating configurations of personal relationships, of which ego-centered networks are but one variant. The most significant quality of social networks for understanding the attribution of “miraculous” power to the relics of renowned saints is that social networks have a life of their own.<sup>228</sup> If an individual dies, its contact network does not die as well, but lives on, albeit in a somewhat adjusted form:

The life of men extends beyond their physical death through their psychosocial networks. A man dies when his social atom dies. Physical and individual death are not the end of life; they can be viewed as functions of an older unit, of the socio-atomic processes in which they are both embedded. (ibid.:84)

In the same way, the network of qualitative relationships created or inherited by a mendicant continues to exist after his/her death in the form of the enduring feeling of relatedness and continuing interaction of the survivors. The extraction of one individual from a web of relationships will not necessarily lead to the dissolution of the entire network or to fundamental changes of its structure.<sup>229</sup> The network will persist, at least for some time, even without formalization and

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<sup>227</sup> Mauss 1902–3/1972:117 argued that the perceived power of “magical acts” is predicated on public opinion and on the emotive force of the social bonds within the social totality within which they are operating; and that the determination of relative value or potential (the terms are used synonymously) “is a game, involving ‘value judgments,’ expressive aphorisms which attribute different qualities to different objects” in which the social sentiments of the “collective thinking” express themselves (ibid.:120f.).

<sup>228</sup> “We have shown that these configurations function as if they were a unit. They may not be the same people with whom the individual is officially related, and who are in turn officially related to him, but they are always people to whom he has a feeling relationship. It is like an *aura* of attractions and rejections, radiating from him and towards him” (Moreno 1947:80).

<sup>229</sup> The imagery of networks and fields of gravity is not unfamiliar to Jaina philosophy, as indicated by Viy<sub>1</sub> 5.3.1 (214a), translated by Schubring 1935/2000: § 92:188f., with a focus on vertical rather than horizontal relationships:

supporting narratives. A similar perspective, but couched in Buddhological terms, informs Strong's (2004a:229) observation that the "Buddha's life story does not stop with his death, just as it does not begin with his birth." Generally, for the survivors the deceased, as opposed to the dead person, lives on (Heidegger 1927:§47).

Most networks are multiplex, without a specific focus. Special cases are networks centered on one individual, a saint for instance, who acts as a common reference point, and hence medium of communication.<sup>230</sup> After the death of the individual, the network will automatically gravitate towards tangible tokens of the lost center as enduring points of reference that allow the web of emotive links and interactions to continue.<sup>231</sup> This tendency towards sociostasis is inevitable, because

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Just as the meshes of a net [*jāla-gaṇṭhiya*] closely following each other by consequently forming in a row without any interval will act upon the next mesh by their gravity, their load, their full weight and their density, thus in every soul in many thousands of reincarnations many thousands of lives by their gravity, their load, their full weight and their density act on their subsequent lives.

A similar vision can be found in RV<sub>1</sub> 10.130.1–2 where the sacrificial connection between ancestors and the living is compared with the weaving of a net, which arguably illustrates how Jaina texts transformed Brāhmaṇical imagery through the metaphorical internalization of sacrifice under Jain doctrinal premises:

1. The sacrifice drawn out with threads on every side . . .  
This do these Fathers weave who hitherward are come:  
they sit beside the warp and cry, 'Weave forth, weave back'.
2. The Man extends it and the Man unbinds it:  
even to this vault of heaven hath he outspun it.  
These pegs are fastened to the seat of worship:  
they made the Sāma-hymns their weaving shuttles.  
(Translation: Griffith 1899; see also Ehni 1896: 147)

For further evidence of "string-theories" in the RV, *ātata-tantu*, see Oberlies 1998:480.

<sup>230)</sup> Cf. Kopytoff's 1986:83 alternative or supplementary analysis which highlights the importance of instrumental political "cognitive and cultural" processes of "singularization" as sources of the power of objects (one may add: and persons): "Power often asserts itself symbolically by insisting on its right to singularize an object, or a set or class of objects" (ibid.:73).

<sup>231)</sup> Cf. Mauss 1925/1988: 41–ff. and Ellen 1988:222 on the objectification of social relationships: "Those items which we subject to any kind of exchange, either concrete items (such as food), notional ones (such as credit transfer), or — as in most cases — a mixture of the two, almost always serve to 'thingify' a relationship."

relationships with significant others form a constitutive part of the individual personality which cannot be instantly changed or reset.<sup>232</sup> Relics, images and nowadays photographs are amongst the set of immediately acceptable material substitutes for a deceased saint that are not reliant on ritual consecration or official authentication to function effectively as media of social interaction.<sup>233</sup> The power that is attributed to them is derived from the continuing emotive energy that informs the relationships that were once centered on the living saint, who him/herself could only function as an attractive medium of social interaction to the extent of his/her ascetic power of detachment and depersonalization. The concept of the saint is itself a relational category.

Power structures based on emotively charged contact networks can also be perpetuated or constructed deliberately by introducing conventional symbols or signs such as funerary cenotaphs, amulets and of course relics, as place holders for a deceased saint.<sup>234</sup> In an interview conducted in Sujāṅgarḥ on 21 December 2008, Ācārya Mahāprajña, the contemporary leader of the Terāpanth monastic order, which rejects image worship as a matter of principle but now engages in the construction of relic *stūpas* as well, asserts that Jaina relic shrines, whether in heaven or on earth, have nothing to do with religion or spirituality, but much with faith and with institutional conquest, *saṁsthān-vijaya*, and with the consolidation of gains by imprinting the memory of sectarian history onto the social landscape via a network of sacred sites.<sup>235</sup>

Of the two classical sociological theories of the objectification of social relationships by Marx and Mauss, only Marx' theory offers a non-normative approach suitable to explaining the potential social

<sup>232</sup>) “[W]hat happens within one actor is by nature not much different from what happens between actors” (Dumont 1966/1980:xxxvi).

<sup>233</sup>) “Few if any relics need to be consecrated in order to make them effective; very many images do” (Freedberg 1989:97). A different question is the authentication of relics, especially those which travelled, on which see for instance Geary 1978 and Trainor 1997.

<sup>234</sup>) Laum 1924:158–61 argued that the historical origins of money (in Europe) derive from contexts of state-controlled transactions surrounding collective sacrifice.

<sup>235</sup>) The veneration of Terāpanth saints by chanting their names, Ācārya Jayācārya 1981:114 wrote, “is effective because it bears the stamp of authority” (v. 956).



function of relics in general.<sup>236</sup> In many ways, the task of modeling the transition from a network structure oriented towards a focal individual to a structure centered on material placeholders is formally similar to the task undertaken by Marx (1867/1890/1962:62–92) to model the theoretical transition from the elementary or accidental form of value to the general form of value and to the money form in order to logically reconstruct the evolution of “commodity fetishism,” i.e., “a definite social relation between human beings” which necessarily assumes in the eyes of the participants “the fantastic form of a relation between things” (ibid.:86).<sup>237</sup> Simmel (1900/1989:254–91) showed how Marx’ analysis of the process of the objectification of social relationships can be transposed to other social contexts; for instance, how an exemplary individual (“the stranger”) by virtue of his/her detachment from common social intercourse can, like money, function as a universally acceptable telos beyond all particular interests and hence as a medium for the integration of diverse social relationships.<sup>238</sup> For Simmel, the cryptic units of the “personality” and of the “soul” (the money of the mind) are also social forms constituted through the objectification of relationships. Like money, the soul is an abstract reference point for diverse relationships and qualities, which in turn are the only means by which the qualities of the abstract reference point itself can be inferred (ibid.:393).

I would argue that a general theory of objectification of social relationships in the media of social interaction also holds true for the case of the relics of influential religious figures. There is not only a fetishism of commodities, a fetishism of the gift, a fetishism of words, and a

<sup>236</sup> Mauss 1925/1988:37 recurs to a normative framework of three obligations: to give, receive and repay, to explain the obligatory force of the bond established by the gift. Parsons 1963 posits the dominance of the cultural system. Luhmann’s 1976 non-normative theory is extremely abstract, entirely formal, and does not address the question of fetishism.

<sup>237</sup> Compare the research strategies of Bloch 1990:176 and of Moreno 1945:24 who states: “The statistical distribution of attractions and repulsions is affected by some esoteric factor.... It is dependent upon both, or all, the individuals and is not the subjective, independent product of each person. Out of these operations of the tele factor a product results which has the character of an objective, a supra-individual system” (ibid.).

<sup>238</sup> See the example in Tambiah 1984:390, n. 64.

fetishism of the soul, but also a fetishism of relics.<sup>239</sup> Like money, *bona fide* relics are not merely physical objects; they are also social forms. Their “miraculous” metaphysical qualities derive, like those of money, in part from their function as media of social interaction. As a focus of emotive energy within a social configuration, relics, like living saints, can appear to be the source rather than the recipient of the energy that pervades the social configuration. The participant’s perspective is not entirely wrong. It is in fact constitutive for the system, because without a common point of reference a network of relationships would not necessarily add up to more than the sum of its parts. But in reality, the power of relics to act as catalysts derives from the individuals who are oriented towards them and from the emotive energy with which relics are invested, not from their intrinsic qualities.

The advantage of a network analytical theory of the *objectification of social relationships*, compared to the model of the *objectification of charisma*, is that it is a non-subjectivist model. It does not need to make *a priori* assumptions about the presumed analytical significance of metaphysical entities, cultural values, aesthetic forms or political strategies, nor about the status system of a particular society, in contrast to the majority of theories concerned with the problem of explaining the metaphysical presence of deceased saints in their relics. Such a theory effectively explains how at base the miraculous role of relics as social catalysts can emerge spontaneously through self-regulative mechanisms.

A culturalist interpretation could point to the fact that in Jaina literature and religious practice relics of exemplary ascetics are clearly described as having “power”<sup>240</sup> and conveying “good fortune.”<sup>241</sup> It could also refer to the somewhat ambiguous distinction between pure

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<sup>239)</sup> The same point has been made by Ellen 1988:222f. However, like the contributors to the volume edited by Appadurai 1986, Ellen tends to interpret all forms of objectification as analogues of commodification without consideration of the specific qualities of the social relationships concerned. He also does not consider the role of living personalities such as mendicants as mediums of social interaction and as symbolically generalized means of communication. The focus of Ellen’s article, whose conventional descriptions of attributions of causative powers to objects are unconnected with the model of objectification, are cognitive processes not social systems.

<sup>240)</sup> TŚPC 6.522–565, translated by Johnson 1931 I: 364f.

<sup>241)</sup> TŚPC 13.245–272, translated by Johnson 1962 VI: 351f.

and impure matter, *subha*- and *asubha poggala*, in *Viy*<sub>1</sub> 5.9.2 (246b), 14.8, etc., and to the Jaina category of special matter formed quasi-alchemically by mixed karmic and natural causes, *mīsa-parīṇaya poggala* (*Viy*<sub>1</sub> 8.1.2 [328a–332b]). These emic categories point to the possibility of analyzing the process of the symbolic transformation of ascetic labor, *śrama*, into objectified power circulating in form of the *persona* of socially recognized ascetics or their relics, which can be logically reconstructed in analogy to the analysis of the genesis and “fetishism” of money by Marx (1867/1890/1977:49–98) and the fetishism of the gift by Mauss (1925/1988); as Taussig (1980:37f.), Tambiah (1984: 340f.), Ellen (1988:222f.), Bloch (1990:176) and others have pointed out for other contexts.<sup>242</sup> However, in contrast to money, relics do not represent universal exchange value, but remain intrinsically connected with the personality of the deceased and their associated particular psychogeographical networks.<sup>243</sup> In contrast to ideas on the transferability of karman prevalent in Buddhism, according to Jaina doctrine and dominant religious practice, neither karmic particles nor the relics produced by karman can circulate like modern money in an entirely depersonalized form. Relics have no exchange value or purchasing power, though theoretically they can function as measures of value (of the deceased) and stores of (karmically encoded) merit. Sociologically, they are “inalienable possessions” which function as stable reference points beyond the sphere of social exchange, like the Jaina concept of the soul functions as a transcendent reference point for the control of the influx and outflux of karmic matter. The psychological correlates of the problem of contingency and the orientation towards relics of venerable saints as stable points of reference were aptly explained to the present writer by a Sthānakavāsī Jain who is not strictly opposed to relic veneration as such because “people want it” and “many ways lead

<sup>242)</sup> “We have learned two lessons since the days of *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft*: Firstly, probably all societies have their versions of ‘fetishism’ of objects. Secondly, the manner in which objects and persons are intertwined and evaluated differs according to each society’s cosmological design and cultural grid, in which social, divine, animal, and object hierarchies are mutually implicated” (Tambiah 1984: 340).

<sup>243)</sup> Following Fichtenau 1952, Geary 1978/1990:31 points to the continuing identification of relics with the deceased saint, and suggests that behind the cult of relics is “a natural inclination to think of power and influence in personal terms.”

to god.” He described relic veneration, in game-theoretical terms, as a win-win strategy for everyone involved.<sup>244</sup>

Venerating *samādhis* offers a 50/50 or 60/40 chance of success. Whenever you go there and pray for something, then either you will win, that is, your wish will come true, and then you will become a devotee, or you loose, that is, your wish will not come true, and there is no loss because you were no devotee in the first place.

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<sup>244</sup> S. Jain, personal communication, Ludhiyānā 27.12.2009. From a materialistic point of view, he emphasized, “shrines are means for the acquisition of social status and for the collection of charitable funds.”

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## **Torah and Taboo: Containing Jewish Relics and Jewish Identity at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

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### **Abstract**

Is museum space religious space? Do strategies of display, i.e., the ways certain objects such as human remains and ritual items are presented and/or experienced, make them into sacred objects? Who or what determines whether or not a particular object may be appropriately displayed in a museum context? In focusing on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and on a series of staged encounters there with spaces, objects, and other people, this article considers the possibility that the USHMM serves as a contemporary Jewish reliquary as well as the implications of such a notion, especially in relation to the performance of different types of Jewish identity at the museum. Using archival sources, it examines the debates over the treatment and display of selected artifacts and how those decisions impact the Museum's Jewish character.<sup>1</sup>

### **Keywords**

Holocaust, museum, Torah, hair, burial, Jewish

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## Introduction

At a memorable, but strange, moment in one's long walk through the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), the visitor comes upon a fourth-floor room distinctly different in style and structure from the rest of the museum — “a space completely disjointed from the rest of the exhibition space,” as Edward Linenthal notes (1995:185). It is not one of the odd gallery-type transitional spaces between floors, filled as they are with abstract art by Ellsworth Kelley and Sol LeWitt, though it almost could be. Rather, it occurs between a glass bridge etched with the names of “Lost Communities” and the “Tower of Faces,” the Ejszyski Shtetl collection compiled by Yaffa Eliach, for which this room serves as prelude. The room is dimly lit and sparsely decorated (I think that is the right word), like an art gallery — a “High Modernist display,” as Laura Levitt describes it (2007:198), with eight photographs of Eastern European Orthodox Jews in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine taken by Roman Vishniac, the celebrated photographer of a vanished world, from 1935–9. In the center of the room is a glass case holding an apparently intact *Megillat Esther* (unlike the damaged Torah scrolls displayed in a later gallery),<sup>2</sup> the Book (literally, Scroll) of Esther, one of five biblical “scrolls” read ritually at different occasions during the course of the Jewish year. Its display “only heightens the feeling that this is a sacred Jewish space” (Levitt 2007:198). *Megillat Esther* is read aloud on the Jewish holiday of Purim, during which we commemorate and celebrate the deliverance from attempted genocide at the instigation of the wicked Haman in ancient Persia. The text, named after its heroine, who boldly appears uninvited before the king in order to expose Haman and plead on behalf of the Jews, is appropriate in a museum of the Holocaust, though I doubt many visitors recognize its significance. At the doorway

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<sup>2</sup> The case in the Vishniac room has in the past held a Torah scroll instead of a Book of Esther.

to this room is a cast-metal *mezuzah* case, a traditional Jewish decorative object designed to hold the mezuzah itself, a parchment on which is written the biblical passages from Deuteronomy (6:4–9 and 11:13–21) that pronounce the commandment to “inscribe these words on the doorposts of your homes and on your gates.” The USHMM is not anyone’s home, however, and *halakhah* (Jewish law) would not require a mezuzah on this doorway. In fact, it appears that this is the only mezuzah or mezuzah case in the museum, and it does serve a symbolic function. The object is actually an artifact donated to the museum in 1993 by Benjamin Meed, Chair of the museum’s Content Committee and a significant force in the USHMM’s creation and, like many of the artifacts in the USHMM collection, it is a remnant from World War II. Israel Miedzyrecki, the donor’s father, was the original owner; he found it in Poland upon his return after the war and placed it on each of his doorposts every time he moved. At the USHMM, however, it does not contain a *klaf*, the parchment that would actually define it halakhically as a mezuzah.<sup>3</sup> This does not detract from its symbolic significance, though, since, as Vanessa Ochs suggests, “the holiness of an explicitly Jewish object is not necessarily compromised when the object is used in a manner incompatible, fully or partially, and consciously or not, with Jewish law” (Ochs 2007:104). This segment of the Permanent Exhibition (PE) is titled “On the Eve of Destruction,” but I will refer to it, as do many of the professionals at the USHMM, as the Vishniac room.

What does this room signify? What is significant about its layout, its displays, its distinctly Jewish markings? I want to suggest that the Vishniac room provides an excellent entry into a discussion of the representational complexities of and debates over the invocation of religion and, specifically, (1) the display of Jewish ritual objects in a secular, national museum; (2) the sacrality of those objects; (3) the notion of Jewish relics in general; and (4) the museological treatment of such objects. Moreover, the Vishniac room offers an entry point into a discussion of how these issues might be accentuated when we consider the display of desecrated ritual objects and even the display and/or preservation of human remains.

<sup>3</sup> My thanks to Susan Goldstein Snyder, Curator at the USHMM, for providing me with information on the mezuzah case’s provenance.

It should be noted, however, that the very notion of a Jewish relic is something of an oxymoron. If religious relics “may loosely be defined as the venerated remains of venerable persons [which] should be taken to include not only the bodies, bones, or ashes of saints, heroes, martyrs, founders of religious traditions, and other holy men and women but also objects that they once owned and, by extension, things that were once in physical contact with them” (Strong 2005:7686), there is little of this in Jewish practice. There are long traditions among North African, Middle Eastern, and Hasidic Jews involving the veneration of saints’ graves (see Ben-Ami 1998), but these practices are limited, and contact with actual human remains is strictly proscribed. While Judaism is certainly more of a material-religious culture than many might admit, most Jews remain wary of material remains and remnants precisely because of their association with death. The material culture of Holocaust remembrance offers perhaps the one key exception, and a significant precursor to the USHMM and its treatment of Jewish remains and remnants is “*Martef ha-Shoah*,” the “Holocaust Cellar” on Mt. Zion, in Jerusalem, which was dedicated on the 10th day of the Hebrew month of Av in 1949 and, by the mid-1950s, included buried “martyrs’ ashes” and scorched Torah fragments from the Rashi synagogue in Worms and displays of European Torah scrolls and scrolls of the Book of Esther, among other items (Bar 2005:17–20).

The USHMM is a “narrative historical museum” (in the words of Shaike Weinberg, founding director of the museum, in the museum catalogue, written with Rina Elieli, a consultant), its exhibit designed to educate, to “arouse processes of identification. Visitors project themselves into the story and thus experience it like insiders while at the same time remaining at a distance, with the intellectual perspective of outsiders. . . . Drawn into the flow of the narrative, visitors view the display with their senses tuned to sequence, coherence, and transformation. They not only register isolated facts, they also search for meaning. They walk through the exhibition galleries as if walking through a three-dimensionally presented oral history whose meaning transcends the original historical limitations of time and space” (Weinberg and Elieli 1995:49). I will return to this notion of identification; for now, it would seem that the Vishniac room is an anomaly in this museum. So what is it doing here? Weinberg and Elieli acknowledge this is one

of only three segments meant to show “the victims as they looked and lived before the war, before they were victimized.... portraying the human face of the living Jew” (Weinberg and Elieli 1995:71–2).<sup>4</sup> But of course many of these are still photographs, and they are invested with the knowledge of anticipated destruction visitors bring to the museum (something akin to what Michael André Bernstein (1994) calls “backshadowing”), and so I question whether or not they truly represent Jewish life in any real sense. Do they not rather offer a nostalgic, elegiac view of the life that we know was lost?

In a certain sense, the central question of this article might be phrased, “Is museum space religious space?” That is to say, “What kinds of discourses, in what contexts, in which museums, suggest or invoke religiosity or some aspect thereof?” To focus my inquiry, I will approach this issue in the particular context of the strategies of display at this specific museum site, i.e., the ways certain objects, such as human and cultural remains, are presented and/or experienced, and whether those strategies make them into sacred objects of some sort. I am focusing on the USHMM and, specifically, on a series of staged encounters there with spaces, objects, and other people, which shape the visitors’ museum experiences while simultaneously framing what might be called the USHMM’s worldview. In particular, I investigate here the treatment of Jewish objects as well as the question as to whether or not these objects are handled “Jewishly,” that is, in accordance with halakhah and with respect for specifically Jewish sensibilities. In order to further focus my investigation, I want to ask specifically, “Is the USHMM Jewish?” while asking as well “How would we know?” and “Why would it matter?” In posing these questions, I realize I am returning to territory well covered by several scholars, most notably Ed Linenthal in his landmark study (1995) of the USHMM’s genesis. In

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<sup>4</sup>) The others cited by Weinberg and Elieli are “Life before the Holocaust,” a display, close to the start of the PE, of five monitor programs screening repeated loops of archival footage and photographs of Jewish life throughout Europe and North Africa, and the aforementioned “Tower of Faces,” which does indeed feature images across a range of recognizable Jewish identities. To this one might add photos of Jews featured in monitors on display in the ghetto segment of the PE. My thanks to Judith Cohen, Director, Photographic Reference Collection at the USHMM, for calling my attention to this last point.

that book, Linenthal thoroughly articulates all the twists and turns of the museum's identity struggle between the dual pressures of too much and too little Jewishness. In this article I would like to supplement Linenthal's study by paying particular attention to a selection of PE segments and objects in the museum and augmenting his research with archival data from the USHMM's own institutional collection.

The question of Jewishness, then, is more than a mere organizing rubric for this article, because it foregrounds the issues of religion and, in particular, religious identity that I argue are central to the questions of design and experience I have made the focus of this discussion. Asking about how Jewishness is or is not marked at the USHMM, whether overtly or covertly, sharpens our understanding of the museum's mission(s) and message(s).

It is also no mere intellectual exercise. In a rich and provocative comment on the transposition of national and memorial space effected by the USHMM, Liliane Weissberg declares,

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, bearing a national claim in its very name, does not only delimit the effort of journeying, but also that of having to consider another country, Israel, as a safe harbor for Jews. Visiting the museum, Jews should not feel like Jews but like American Jews or, simply, like Americans. At the same time, the museum creates a process of identification that is intended to turn every visitor into a Jew. The museum is not built to represent Jewish history. History becomes Jewish insofar as it becomes a victim's narrative. It becomes American by the very structure in which the story is told. Deportation and rescue: this is another version of the pilgrim's tale. (Weissberg 1999:54)

But the vast majority of the USHMM's visitors (perhaps up to 90%) are not Jewish,<sup>5</sup> and so the transposition of space Weissberg notes (the process by which a European place is physically transported into an American one — I will return to this below) quickly becomes a transposition of identity, one that Weissberg describes as Jewish by nature of its being that of the (generic?) victim, which may or may not conform to our ideas about Jewish identity in general.

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<sup>5</sup>) Michael Berenbaum, telephone conversation with the author, July 15, 2009. Berenbaum notes further that perhaps 2/3 of American Jewry have visited the USHMM.



The main issue that invites this investigation is what one might call the USHMM's central rhetoric of authenticity. It can be argued that the entire museum is built on and out of this sense of the "authentic." Weinberg and Elieli suggest that museums like San Francisco's Exploratorium, in not displaying historical artifacts in its exhibit, "sacrificed the most sacred taboo of the traditional museum world — namely, the principle of authenticity — on the altar of didactic expediency" (Weinberg and Elieli 1995:50). The USHMM's exhibition, they declare, "should only include authentic material... deviat[ing]... in very few cases" (Weinberg and Elieli 1995:57). Incidentally, it is ironic that Weinberg, known for creating a pioneering museum — Beth Hatefutsoth, The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, in Tel Aviv — that did not make material remnants central to its visitors' experiences, eventually endorsed this view; as we will see below, acquiring the artifacts helped him come to this position. Authenticity certainly plays a role in the museum building's design by the late James Ingo Freed, in its early collection development, and, especially, in its strategies of display: throughout the USHMM, glass cases display authentic objects, while overhead, authentic newsreels scroll past, authentic photographs gaze out at us, and, on occasion, authentic environments are created to enhance the visitor's experience (such as the cobblestone floor at the entrance to the section on ghettos).<sup>6</sup> Authenticity itself is a fraught concept; Stuart Charmé suggests that a rhetoric of authenticity pervades the world of Jewish culture in a number of ways, including nostalgia for an idealized universe of more "authentic" Jewishness and/or a "particular understanding of a concept of [religious] 'tradition' that is accepted as normative and authoritative" (Charmé 2000:138). He also reminds us that the Holocaust rendered moot many of the internal Jewish debates regarding authentic Jewish identity (such as whether religious or secular Jewish identity was more authentic): Jewish identity was now defined and imposed from the outside. Indeed, Charmé points out that one of the successes of post-Holocaust Jewry is the freedom to choose from several existentialist,

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<sup>6</sup> On this note, one must recognize the USHMM's consistent regard for tastefulness and general understatement; other, more Disney-like museums to remain unnamed here, go much further, trading a sense of authenticity for the simulacrum of the real, sometimes to horrific, excessive effect.

rather than essentialist, options: “The pluralism of American Judaism is an implicit testimony to the idea of multiple forms of authentic Jewishness” (Charmé 2000:142).

What are the forms of Jewishness active in contemporary society? It could be argued that there are essentially four main overlapping, dynamic types of Jewish identity we might call biological, cultural, national, and religious. Without belaboring the point, we can understand these types in the following ways: (1) biological Jewish identity is really the Jewishness of antisemitism; it is Jewishness as defined negatively, from the outside, peaking in Nazi attempts to racially classify the Jew. It has little place in contemporary discourse about Jewishness, though it serves as an important reference point for any discussion of Jewish identity. In many ways, this is the most pervasive form of Jewish identification at the USHMM, if only because, as a museum of the Holocaust, it largely presents Nazi views of Jews. (2) Cultural Jewish identity is “bagels-and-lox” Jewishness, though that is not meant to be pejorative. Cultural Jewishness is a broad region of tastes and allegiances, sometimes elevated to an ideology, sometimes not much more than a preference for chicken soup, sometimes represented in a language like Yiddish or Ladino, but generally embraced as a positive mark of social belonging. Cultural Jewishness turns up sometimes in archival photos of Jewish cultural activities during the war that, when performed even in ghettos, took on the characteristics of resistance. New York’s Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, presents cultural Jewishness as a positive response to the horrors of WWII in its third, postwar floor display of Jews in entertainment. (3) National Jewish identity emerges in Zionism and, of course, in any affiliation with the State of Israel. Another positive mark of Jewishness, national Jewish identity takes note of the Israeli civil religious calendar. National Jewishness, naturally, has little presence at the USHMM (though it does appear near the end of the PE narrative in stories of Holocaust survivors reaching Palestine through the illegal “Aliya Bet,” and in the display of a facsimile of Israel’s Declaration of Independence), though of course it is a primary component of the exhibition narrative at Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust museum. (4) Finally, religious Jewish identity is that which identifies with the structures of Jewish spiritual life: its calendar, its ethical concerns, its dietary

laws and the entire rafters of its halakhic (legal) considerations, and so on. To the extent that the USHMM has considered religious sensibilities, such as the fact that it is closed on Yom Kippur (the only other day the museum is closed is Christmas Day), or that kosher food is available in its café, this type of identity is acknowledged there, but it is hardly emphasized. It is this last category of positive Jewish identification that particularly interests me here.

So what is Jewish in the USHMM? Aside from the aforementioned initial display of “Life before the Holocaust,” consisting of silent footage, there is little that marks the victims as specifically and positively Jewish in the first part of the museum; Jews are generally portrayed more often as negative stereotypes, except perhaps in a case on “Jewish Responses” (to the onset of Nazism), which offers a slightly more noticeable image of Jewish self-definition, much of it focused on emigration or preparations for emigration. (One might read into this a quasi-Zionist view of Jewishness, in which these people, marked more clearly as “authentic” Jews, also have the means and the foresight to become agents of their own destiny and leave Germany. This segment is missing from Weinberg and Elieli’s catalogue.)

However, one of the most visibly Jewish segments of the PE — in terms of the display of clearly Jewish artifacts — is the *Kristallnacht* display, marking the anti-Jewish pogrom of November 9–10, 1938, at the center of which, under four video monitors and surrounded by images of the destruction of Jewish houses of worship — including a remnant façade of an “*aron ha-kodesh*,” the “holy ark” meant to contain Torah scrolls, from Nentershausen, standing sentry here with its epigraph, “*da lifnei mi atah omed*,” “know before whom you stand,” which was deliberately axed out by the Nazis on Kristallnacht (see Weinberg and Elieli 1995:90) — lies a glass case (see figure 1) containing portions of desecrated Torah scrolls (in direct contrast, I would suggest, to the display of *Megillat Esther* in the Vishniac room) from synagogues in Marburg and Vienna whose provenance can be traced to that fateful night (one is open to the ten commandments, so that the dictum “Thou shall not murder” is visible, if one can read the Hebrew). The display of these scrolls is somewhat complex with respect to the issue of Jewishness, and its history highlights the tension between the requirements of authenticity and material evidence, on



*Figure 1.* Display case of Torah scrolls desecrated during the Kristallnacht pogrom in Germany, 4th floor of the Permanent Exhibition, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Copyright Alan Gilbert Photography ([www.photopian.com](http://www.photopian.com)).

one hand, and the awareness of and concern for Jewish sensitivities on the other. Normally, according to Rabbinic law, Torah scroll fragments should be buried, or stored prior to burial in a *geniza*, a synagogue's depository for unusable texts that, because they contain the name of God, remain holy; their sanctity remains intact, even if their ritual usefulness has not, and their storage or burial is meant to protect them from use. How did the USHMM decide to display these desecrated scrolls in this manner?

As in many segments of the PE, museum committee members sought authentic artifacts to illustrate the narrative they were developing even as they discussed broader, conceptual, and/or alternate methods of conveying the necessary information. For example, typed notes for a discussion on elements to be covered in a Kristallnacht exhibit labeled "Content Team Meeting, 11/10/87" (the 49th anniversary of

the event, it should be noted) review in great detail the historical significance of the event and list a series of exhibition materials, including photographs, newsreel footage, and eyewitness testimony, and mention, under “materials to look for,” Torah “Wimpels” (binders for the Torah scrolls that also served as birth records), but do not cite actual desecrated Torah scrolls as desired display items, despite the fact that fire is noted as a special “theme” to consider:

Continuity of fire as a theme (from book burnings, to synagogue burnings/Torah burnings, to the crematoria which follow); Torah as the symbolic intermediate step: the most holy “thing” in Jewish life, actually treated as a living person (dressed, cradled in arms, buried when no longer fit for use). Fire as the element of martyrdom in ancient times; the rabbinic tale of the “parchment may be burning, but the letters are taking wing.”

In an outline labeled “Content team Meeting — 11/24/87,” the basic concepts for the Kristallnacht display are further distilled, and one sub-heading highlights, “Desecration with intentionality of spiritual center: burning the Torah (Bible) as opposed to burning the book,” and the subsequent main heading declares, “Basic Metaphor: The Tension Between the Spiritual and the Profane.”<sup>7</sup>

Over the next few years and as the PE took shape museum officials began a concerted effort to locate authentic artifacts, including Torah scrolls, and secure their donation or long-term loan to the USHMM. A list of “wanted artifacts” dated July 17, 1989 includes, under the heading “JEWISH MATERIALS,”

religious artifacts — in all conditions:  
Torahs & covers & sash/fabric tie  
Torah spindles  
Pointers — as many as possible  
Torah shields/plates  
Eternal lights  
Menorah & candles

<sup>7</sup>) Content Committee-November 17, 1987 file, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 997–016.1, Box 1 of 4, Research Institute, Michael Berenbaum’s Memoranda and Reports. Academic Committee, General Info-Content Committee, May 11, 1988.

Shabbat candles & candlesticks  
 Kiddush cup  
 spice box  
 Mezuzot  
 Tallit (prayer shawls) & velvet bags  
 broken gravestones  
 cemetery gate  
 items similar to those seen in Kracow synagogue:  
     steel gazebo  
     candelabra<sup>8</sup>

Inter-departmental memos in 1989 reveal discussions concerning the importance of the acquisition of Torah scrolls for display. Joseph Bamberger, whose father had rescued a Torah scroll from their family's synagogue in Hamburg on the night of November 9, 1938, offered it to the museum in a letter dated March 19, 1989. Museum curator Susan Morgenstein replied on April 4, 1989, expressing interest in the Torah and its story, though this Torah was not in the end acquired. On November 30, Michael Berenbaum, project director of the USHMM, wrote Evelyn Friedlander of the Westminster Synagogue in London, which established the Memorial Scrolls Trust as an organization responsible for rescuing 1,564 Torah Scrolls and 400 Torah Binders collected at the Jewish Museum in Prague during the Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia in Czechoslovakia in the Second World War (see Memorial Scrolls Trust Official Website 2009). Friedlander was a trustee at the time and is currently the chair of the Trust, which loans out the scrolls to synagogues and organizations for memorial and educational purposes. Berenbaum wrote her on behalf of the museum to formally request

two Torahs, preferably one that was most seriously damaged during the Holocaust. If we had our choice, we would prefer a Torah scroll that was visually damaged, either by flame or desecration during Kristallnacht, and one that is preserved from Jewish life before the Holocaust. . . . As you know from our design plan, we are anxious to collect material on the assault against Jewish life in Germany during the period between 1933 and 1939. Any large artifactual material

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<sup>8</sup>) "Artifacts Lists" file, in USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1998–011, box 5 of 36, Research Institute, Subject Files of the Director Michael Berenbaum, 1987–91.

that might be available from this period, such as an ark that was desecrated or destroyed; a tombstone that was destroyed; prayer books; holy ritual objects and communal records would be of utmost importance to the Museum.<sup>9</sup>

Another Kristallnacht Torah — this one visibly damaged — held by *Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes* (DÖW) was inspected by a museum representative in Vienna in the summer of 1990 and was subsequently loaned to the USHMM for display; in December 1995 DÖW upgraded the loan to a gift, an event noted in museum emails as significant because it had been “very high” on the museum’s “wish list.”<sup>10</sup> In typed notes titled “DESIGN MEETING / JULY 15, 1991,” the topic “Krystal Nacht” (sic) heads a brief paragraph: “Need staging to view artifacts. In center have burning pit with prayer books in middle of pit. Before and After photos of synagogues. Monitors outside.” But handwritten comments in the same archival file note, under the heading “Torahs/Kristallnacht,” “suddenly several / 1 damaged coming — from Marbrück / 1 [damaged] poss[ibly] from Vienna — slashed / SW: Take only K’nacht + only damaged.”<sup>11</sup> Clearly, as the possibility for acquisition of authentic Torah scrolls actually damaged on Kristallnacht increased, the design of the PE evolved to accommodate such objects.

Such accommodation required museum planners to consider the implications of actually displaying desecrated Torah scrolls. Though considering the issue in a slightly different context, Vanessa Ochs well-summarizes the potential debates:

Does the desire for effective Holocaust education justify depriving a Torah scroll of a traditional burial so that it might become the memorial shrine we need? If

<sup>9</sup>) “Artifacts — miscellaneous lists and correspondence” file, in USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1998–011, box 5 of 36, Research Institute, Subject Files of the Director Michael Berenbaum, 1987–91. One of the Memorial Scrolls Trust Torah scrolls used to be on display in the center of the Vishniac room, before it was exchanged for the Megillah. For an analysis of the acquisition and use of Torah scrolls from the Memorial Scrolls Trust in American synagogues see Ochs 2007:187–213.

<sup>10</sup>) 4.23 Night of Broken Glass (artifacts) file, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1998–038.1, box 4, Exhibitions, Curator’s P. E. Segment Files, 1990–4.

<sup>11</sup>) 4.21 Night of Broken Glass (design) file, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1998–038.1, Exhibitions, box 4, Curator’s P. E. Segment Files, 1990–4.

we cannot keep the survivors among us alive so we can keep hearing their stories, does that permit us to enshrine a rescued Torah scroll within a lively synagogue, with the hope that its presence alone will be sufficiently eloquent to tell the story of the Holocaust for generations to come? (Ochs 2007:188)

Technically, putting Torah fragments on display rather than burying them or storing them in a geniza could violate the prohibition against “embarrassing” a Torah scroll. There is an interesting halakhic case, recorded by R. Ephraim Oshry in his collection of *Responsa* from the Holocaust, where a Torah scroll of exceptional lineage (it had once belonged to the famed Gaon, or “genius,” R. Eliyahu of Vilna himself) had been hidden in the Kovno Ghetto to protect it from desecration, but after the war it turns out it had been discovered and had been cut into pieces. The questioner wanted to know whether or not it was permissible to keep the fragments in his house as a memorial. R. Oshry replied that it was permissible, “since the entire purpose of geniza is to protect the honor of the Torah scroll, which would be considered desecrated or shamed if it were not kept in a protected place. Since the questioner sought to preserve the Torah scroll and guard the fragments as a memorial to the members of his family murdered by the Germans, this is certainly the most fitting type of geniza for these fragments,” so long as they are not kept in a bedroom (Oshry 2001:174–5).<sup>12</sup>

It is not clear if museum planners knew of this ruling, but they certainly considered the propriety of displaying the scrolls, evidenced by responses to visitors’ concerns after opening in April 1993. For example, a visitor comment card submitted by Elliott Stutz (who wrote his name and address as an indication he wanted a response) within the first few months of the museum opening notes, “In the first few exhibits, there are a number of Torah scroll parchments. These, according to

<sup>12</sup> “*Responsa*” (in Hebrew, “*She’elot u’Teshuvot*,” literally “Questions and Answers”) are a unique body of Jewish halakhic literature: lacking a centralized legal authority since the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem, Jewish communities worldwide have for centuries submitted questions to local rabbinic authorities for adjudication on the finer points of halakhah. These questions and the responses of the rabbis were and are often collected, and they form the basis not only for later understanding of the legal traditions in a given community, but also as a record of evolving halakhic attitudes to changing legal circumstances. For an extensive treatment of R. Oshry’s *responsa*, see Rosenbaum 1976. Thanks to Avi Patt for providing a copy of R. Oshry’s responsum.



Jewish law should be either used if they are intact, or buried as a holy article. Displayed as they are, near the floor, scattered, is a desecration of a Jewish holy article, something which I think is contrary to the purpose of this memorial.” Raye Farr, Director of the PE, replied in a letter on August 9, 1993 with thanks for his interest and understanding of his concern, noting that “several visitors” expressed such questions. “Please understand that it is certainly not our intention to desecrate the Torah in any way.” Farr continues, saying that she has consulted with Dr. Michael Berenbaum, who was project director for the PE up to the museum’s opening and is also an ordained rabbi, saying that he

has inquired of several rabbanim [rabbis] whether our display violates Jewish law. While ordinarily a desecrated scroll must be buried, they were willing to permit its display in this manner. Dr. Berenbaum is familiar with the Halakhic sources. However, he points out that this museum is an American institution and cannot be bound by religious law (even as it must respect the sensibilities, religious or otherwise, of the victims). He is continuing to look into the matter and has requested a written ruling that will be made available upon its release.

Please be assured that we have taken great troubles not to redesecrate the Torahs in displaying their desecration. We have elevated the floor, covered it in velvet, and placed the Torah scrolls on the velvet.<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, museum planners had thought carefully about the issue, and Farr’s letter suggests they had decided on a balance between halakhic requirements and museological sensibilities, attempting to avoid a rededication in the process of displaying desecration. Indeed, a photograph (see figure 2) taken around November 1992 of an exhibit staging of the Torah scrolls was published in an article titled “Permanent Exhibition” in the 1992 USHMM Annual Report, included in the Museum’s Winter 1992/93 Newsletter, which was disseminated to Council members, donors, and contributing members of the USHMM. Berenbaum recalls that this photograph’s publication and the ensuing debates over what some thought was depicted there — the planned display presentation of the Torah scrolls (at floor level, though

<sup>13</sup>) “Comments: Torah Scrolls” file, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1998–038.2, box 2, Exhibition department: Raye Farr’s Records re: the segment development of the Permanent Exhibition, 1990–4.



*Figure 2.* Photograph originally published in the 1992 USHMM Annual Report. The original caption reads, “At a staging held in preparation for the mounting of the *Night of Broken Glass* exhibit segment, the design team arranges desecrated Torah scrolls exactly as they will appear in the permanent exhibition.” The photograph is attributed to Raye Farr. Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

on top of velvet) — was what encouraged museum planners to carefully consider every aspect of the Torah scrolls’ exhibition with great sensitivity.<sup>14</sup>

Email exchanges in February and March of 1997 reveal the issue as an ongoing concern. Stacy Palestrant wrote of receiving two phone calls from an Orthodox rabbi expressing similar concerns about the display and asking if an Orthodox rabbi had been consulted, and if so, whom. Further comments in the email thread from Suzy Goldstein suggest that Palestrant contact Steve Luckert and Scott Miller, and note, “Michael Berenbaum [who had left the USHMM by then] did consult with Rabbinical authorities regarding the religious aspect of the exhibition design of this case. I have also heard people refer to the

<sup>14</sup>) Michael Berenbaum, conversation with the author, July 15, 2009. Thanks to Jeff Carter for locating the published photograph and clarifying its nature and dissemination.

case and exhibition design as a ‘glass casket’” (incidentally, a term used within the museum to this day). Scott Miller then gives what appears to be the final word on the issue:

I’m quite sure that the orthodox rabbi contacted by Michael was Rabbi Pinchas Teitz, a prominent ultra-orthodox rabbinical scholar from New Jersey. . . . If anybody questions the appropriateness of how we display the Torah scrolls, if you say we have permission from Rabbi Teitz, that should be OK — he is that respected. But if somebody wants to see it in writing, which is a legitimate request, you’ll have to ask Michael. The bottom line is to reassure people that the torah scrolls are buried in a glass casket, which is raised above the ground. Thus the scrolls have no appearance of being either unburied or lying on the floor — both prohibited by Jewish law. According to Jewish law, how the PE does it (i.e. under glass) is technically a legal, though nontraditional form of burial. . . . Keep in mind that we have probably had thousands of orthodox rabbis who have gone through the PE, and realized right away the legality and appropriateness of what we have done (otherwise you would have heard from them).<sup>15</sup>

What is most interesting about this resolution is the aspect of burial above ground, in a transparent container, in order to fulfill the educational and, implicitly, the memorial agenda of the display, while satisfying the legal requirements that prevent the Torah scroll from “embarrassment.” This resolution establishes the USHMM as a respectful place, displaying the fragments in a case that essentially functions as a transparent geniza (though without the intention to eventually bury its contents permanently under ground), thus avoiding a halakhic problem and an affront to Jewish religious sensibilities. The Vishniac room (also missing from Weinberg and Elieli’s catalogue), which, as mentioned above, plays counterpoint to the Kristallnacht display in terms of the display of Jewish religious-material culture, follows not long after this section, near the conclusion of the first exhibit floor of the PE.

The next floor of the museum begins with displays illustrating life in the Jewish ghettos. Here, once again, Jews can be seen as agents, albeit temporarily, of their own lives. Soon enough, however, Jews are once again identified by the remnants of their own destruction, in

<sup>15</sup> 4.23 Night of Broken Glass (artifacts) file, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1998–038.1, box 4, Exhibitions, Curator’s Permanent Exhibition Segment Files, 1990–4.

cases filled with belongings collected by the Nazis at the end of the deportation journey. A case of *talitot* (prayer shawls) is the most visibly Jewish of these displays, recalling James Young's warning that, in displaying piles of Jewish objects, we risk remembering Jews in the same manner as the Nazis "remembered" them (Young 1993:133). To be sure, there is an evocation of religion here, but most of these items do not have any halakhic status or even raise any halakhic concerns over their treatment and display.

The issue of the oft-discussed debate over the display of human hair, however, does raise issues relevant to this discussion. While the resultant exhibit neither expresses Jewish identity in any particular way nor poses any halakhic problems, the halakhic status of hair was raised, and the discussions behind the scenes during the planning phase reveal much about the raw symbolism of human hair, the proper display of victimization and dehumanization, and concerns over the desecration of memory if not the objects themselves, whose display contributes to that memory.

The significance of human hair as an artifact essential to the PE narrative is summed up in the course of Linenthal's review of the years-long debate: Director of the PE Martin Smith observed that, "to the Germans [human hair] was simply an industrial product," collected and supplied to Reich agencies or sold to factories to be re-purposed as industrial felt and yarn to be made into socks for U-boat crews and stockings for railroad employees. But, "To me it was the one really personal thing. This isn't wood. This isn't metal. This is part and parcel of people. It's hair, and what is hair for most of us? It's our mothers, it's our lovers... a spot we nestle into" (Linenthal 1995:211). Most of the debates for which records are readily available appear to have occurred in 1989. Linenthal cites a memo by museum consultant Alice Greenwald and former curator Susan Morgenstein, who wrote

While we recognize and share with you the concern for a means to convey both dramatically and soberly the enormity of the human tragedy in the death camps, we cannot endorse the use of a wall of human hair, or ashes and bones. These fragments of human life have an innate sanctity, if you will; they are relics of once vital individuals, which do not belong in a museum setting but rather in a memorial setting. You run the very real risk of creating a cabinet of horrible curiosities by choosing to use them... and encourag[ing]... a more ghoulis than emotionally sympathetic response or painful memorial response. (cited in Linenthal 1995:212)

Greenwald and Morgenstein's objections to displaying human hair arose from its intimate connection to the human body, portions of which, if displayed, would re-commodify those relics and disrespect their "inherent sacredness," in Linenthal's language. "Human remains," they continued, "are not a commodity to be shipped, transported, catalogued, and crafted for dramatic display; we have an obligation — morally — to respect these materials, whose most meaningful placement would be one of ritual burial . . . which the individuals themselves had been denied." Their objections were also based on a distinction between the museum's museological and memorial functions, implying that any museological display of the hair would not be an appropriate memorial display, despite the dual function of the planned museum as a whole. Indeed, they objected less to such display at "the very site of the atrocities and the place of death of the victims," where "evidence of their degradation, manifest in the remaining hair, bones, and ashes, would have validity." But that validity is intransitive in their view, echoed in several other opinions (cited in Linenthal 1995:212–13).<sup>16</sup>

One of the most thorough discussions of the "hair" issue occurred at a regular meeting of the Committee on Collections and Acquisitions of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council (the body charged with planning the museum) in April 1989, to which members of the Archives and Library Committee were invited, as well as other members of the Council, project director Michael Berenbaum, exhibition director Martin Smith, exhibition designer Ralph Appelbaum, and several museum officials and consultants. The main item on the agenda appeared to be the presentation of the PE design and the review of artifacts "proposed to be requested by petition from various institutions in Poland" to the members of both committees. As Smith and Appelbaum presented the design plan, the issue of the hair display was noted in a repetition of the plan for "Tower Spaces" on the third floor of the museum:

They had originally planned to use human ash and bone but decided not to do so for ethical reasons. Mr. Smith also said that there was discussion about the use of human hair. Some survivors said that the hair represented the loss of their

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<sup>16</sup>) For a discussion of the representation of Jewish women at the death camps that also touches on the debate over displaying hair see Jacobs 2006.

personality and should be used. Mr. Appelbaum said that we can't let the killing stop us — that we must go on with the total story — people were turned into material.<sup>17</sup>

Following a discussion of the procedure for requesting artifacts for the PE, slides and photographs of the artifacts were presented, and petitions for their acquisition were approved. But a separate vote was taken concerning the petition to request human hair from the State Museum at Auschwitz, and the minutes record a discussion in which committee members expressed shock, revulsion, offense, and the like at the notion of displaying actual hair. For example,

Anita Reiner said she felt it was desecrating the memory of the victims. She said it was wrong; it offended her in their memory. Jean Rosensaft said that speaking as a museum person, a child of survivors and a parent she found particular artifacts disturbing and shocking. She continued that the prime purpose of the Museum is to instill certain values in people such as respect for human life. She was concerned that the hair would be shown and seen only for its shock value and that its display was subscribing to the values of the perpetrators.<sup>18</sup>

Others argued that the hair was symbolically important and, for the sake of the museum's story, it needed to be displayed. Berenbaum reminded the committees that the debate was about accessioning objects and not the museum's design and pointed out that hair is not actually remains, which was echoed by others. Julius Schatz, the chair, called for a vote, and it was agreed that the hair would be included in the petition.<sup>19</sup> Two days later, a sub-committee of the Committee on Collections and Acquisitions met in New York and reiterated its concerns over the hair issue:

It was the sense of the meeting that we want the design team to be aware that there is a tremendous amount of resistance among committee members and other lay leaders present at the meet [sic] on April 12th to the wholesale display

<sup>17</sup>) Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee on Collections and Acquisitions, April 12, 1989, p. 3, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1997–005.6, Department of Exhibitions and Educational Publications, Minutes and Reports of the Collections and Acquisitions Committee, 1984–91. Hereafter MMCCA.

<sup>18</sup>) MMCCA, April 12, 1989, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup>) MMCCA, April 12, 1989, p. 7.

of human hair, and to the acquisition of human hair as collections material; that the subject requires further discussion and deliberation; that no final decision has been made in regard to these materials; and, that the Committee, reserving its right to continue discussion, will not impede the process of petition going forward.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, nine kilograms of human hair arrived later that year. Sam Eskenazi, Director of Public Affairs for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, viewed it in a storage room in Washington in December 1989 and compiled a series of twelve questions its planned display raised that he wished addressed before the Council announced the display, which he sent in a memo to Michael Berenbaum. Three are of particular interest for this discussion. The first two of these ask, “Is the hair human remains? What constitutes human remains? Are there any religious implications to displaying the hair, and if so, what are they?” and, “How would our display of hair be different from the highly controversial display of Indian remains in other museums? Are the differences significant?” Berenbaum replied on January 5, 1990: “Hair is not human remains. It contains no human cells whatsoever. Ordinarily hair is disposed of at the barber shop by throwing it in the garbage and a dermatologist informed us that it has no human cells. It has absolutely no religious implication to the best of my knowledge.” And, “We are not displaying human remains and consequently our display would be completely different in tone, type, and substance from the display of Indian remains.” Eskenazi’s tenth question proved the most provocative: “If the display of hair proves to be very controversial, is the display of such significance that it is worth dealing with the controversy? Besides its emotive power, why is it so important to display the hair?” Berenbaum replied,

You have now reached with this question the essential part of the hair. The essential part is that the Holocaust represented the most extreme dehumanization of people. The human being was considered a consumable raw material to be discarded in the process of manufacture and then recycled into the Nazi war

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<sup>20</sup>) Minutes of the meeting of the sub-committee of the Committee on Collections and Acquisitions, April 14, 1989, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1997–005.6, Department of Exhibitions and Educational Publications, Minutes and Reports of the Collections and Acquisitions Committee, 1984–91.

economy. . . . It was an essential part of the industrial complex of death. The substance of what was involved in cutting, recycling, and portraying the hair is what should offend, not the display of hair, and I know of no more poignant or powerful way to indicate the substance of human abuse than to show the pile after pile after pile of hair that ended up being seventy tons discovered when Auschwitz was liberated and documents of shipments and of companies competing for such shipments are available to us.<sup>21</sup>

Berenbaum's point is that the historical significance of how the hair came to be an artifact of the Holocaust should trump any emotional reaction to the hair's display; its metonymic power resides in its relationship to the acts of the perpetrators and not in its link to the human beings (women, it must be noted, who also constituted the majority of those opposed to its display) from whom it was shorn. A critical component of this counter-argument is therefore separating the hair from human remains, which Berenbaum had consistently advocated. Hair should not be classified along with actual human remains, such as bone and ash, even as it is emblematic of the nadir of human abuse and its use represents the low point of dehumanization. This view prevailed at the museum content committee meeting on February 13, 1990; after a long discussion, "the committee voted nine to four in favor of displaying the hair" (Linenthal 1995:214).

One might read the following, from a letter written a few days later by Margot Stern Strom, President of Facing History and Ourselves, to Berenbaum, as a comment on the decision: "I've heard that is says in the Zohar that divine judgment is found in your nails and your hair. There must be some meaning in this saying for the museum's decision about including (note I choose including not excluding) hair in the museum. Obviously the context within which hair is included is what I would want to think about, not whether or not to include it."<sup>22</sup> The

<sup>21</sup>) Sam Eskenazi, memorandum to Michael Berenbaum, December 22, 1989; Michael Berenbaum, memorandum to Sam Eskenazi, January 5, 1990; both in 3.43 Branding and Shearing (artifacts) file, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1998–38.1, box 12, Exhibitions, Curator's P. E. Segment Files, 1990–4. In a July 15, 2009 phone conversation Berenbaum noted that he should have said "seven" tons of hair were discovered at Auschwitz in this instance, though eventually a total of 70 tons of shorn human hair was discovered.

<sup>22</sup>) Margot Stern Strom, letter to Michael Berenbaum, February 16, 1990, "Hair" file, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1998–011, box 16 of 36, Research



“word” was out on the hair issue, and the following exchange reveals both evidence of a lingering concern over desecration and the degree to which the case for display had become halakhically focused. On March 7, 1990 Director of External Affairs Alvin Rosenfeld sent a memo to Berenbaum and others regarding a phone inquiry from Pam Abramoff (wife of Council member Jack), who voiced the concerns of a member of the “Jewish priestly clan of Cohanim (hence the surname Cohen) who noted that under Jewish law members of that biblical clan cannot enter a place with human remains. Would the Museum, she asked, include human remains?” Rosenfeld related to her that the planners were aware of this issue and mentioned in this memo that he did not raise the issue of human hair. Abramoff “suggested that perhaps a sign be posted at the entrance to the Museum noting that no human remains were on display.” Berenbaum replied, “There will be no human remains in the Museum. The Museum can be visited by the most observant cohanim, even according to the most stringent Orthodox opinion. Hair is not human remains even according to the strictest Orthodox opinion. Thus, cohanim may also visit barber shops and have their hair cut while they may not go to cemeteries.”<sup>23</sup>

Advocates for displaying the hair were not to have the last word, however. Several survivors, particularly Drs. Helen Fagin and Hadasah Rosensaft, pressed both Ben Meed, chair of the museum’s content committee, and Shaike Weinberg, the museum’s director, to revisit the issue. Rosensaft put it succinctly: “Helen and I are both survivors of Birkenau (and as you understand, our heads were shaved). I do not want my hair, or my dead mother’s hair displayed as part of any exhibition.” In a letter dated May 10, 1991, Meed agreed to bring the matter up for reconsideration.<sup>24</sup> And on October 9, 1991, after Fagin

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Institute Subject Files of the Director, Michael Berenbaum, 1987–91. The *Zohar* is the classic text of medieval Jewish mysticism.

<sup>23</sup> Al[vin] Rosenfeld, memorandum to Sara Bloomfield, Michael Berenbaum, Martin Smith, and Jeshajahu Weinberg, March 7, 1990; Michael Berenbaum, memorandum to Alvin Rosenfeld, March 9, 1990; both in 3.43 Branding and Shearing (artifacts) file, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1998–38.1, box 12, Exhibitions, Curator’s P. E. Segment Files, 1990–4.

<sup>24</sup> Hadassah Rosensaft, letter to Jeshajahu Weinberg, April 29, 1991; Benjamin Meed, letter to Helen Fagin, May 10, 1991; both in 3.43 Branding and Shearing (processing the victims) (design) file, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no.

made a similar argument during the content committee's meeting, Meed announced, "out of respect for such feelings... the museum would keep the hair but not display it" (Linenthal 1995:215).

Linenthal suggests that the reversal concerning the display of hair reveals a clash between the commemorative and educational voices shaping the museum, and shows that "the commemorative voice, the privileged voice of the survivor, won out. For, as Raul Hilberg once remarked, one of the problematic 'rules' of Holocaust speech is that any survivor, no matter how inarticulate, is superior to the greatest Holocaust historian who did not share in the experience" (Linenthal 1995:216). I wonder if it is also about being unable to settle on a suitable container for displaying what should be buried (and thus prevented from being used) under normal circumstances. In this analysis, the display of the Kristallnacht Torah scrolls is ultimately successful because it was possible to present a case, literally, for above ground burial in a transparent coffin. But such an option could not satisfy all the constituencies debating the hair issue because there was no way to reconcile the display with the wish for burial, expressed in not making the hair into a museum object. Here the personal may have trumped the political and even the halakhic, but it also revealed the unease some felt at putting on view so personal a relic of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust.

There is a postscript to this story. In a design meeting in December 1991 the committee discussed design solutions to the now "weak" segment containing the former hair display. Arnold Kramer, the museum's photographer, would be dispatched to Auschwitz to photograph its hair display (see figure 3). And the committee decided that it would be a good idea to have, in the future, "a single braid of real hair" in front of Kramer's proposed enlarged photomural of the Auschwitz hair.<sup>25</sup> In October, Kramer e-mailed staff historian David Luebke, describing his experience photographing the exhibit at the former camp:

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1998–38.1, box 12, Exhibitions, Curator's P. E. Segment Files, 1990–4.

<sup>25</sup>) Design committee meeting, minutes, December 12, 1991, segment #3.43: Processing the Victims, in 3.43 Branding and Shearing (processing the victims) (design) file, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1998–38.1, box 12, Exhibitions, Curator's P. E. Segment Files, 1990–4.



*Figure 3.* Photomural showing a pile of hair shorn from the heads of female prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau as displayed at the National Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, photographed by Arnold Kramer. Reproduced with the permission of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Panstwowe Muzeum w Oswiecim-Brzezinka.

The hair on display at Auschwitz, and included in the photograph, is the hair from the heads of 40,000 people.

I don't really know what it will be like to look at the photograph. For me, standing in front of that mass of hair is to be confronted, in the most direct way that I have experienced, by an excruciating connection to individual lives and mass loss. I had to move some of the hair in the course of preparing the photograph. The touch of it took away my breath.<sup>26</sup>

The implication is that something of the real presence of the Holocaust, through the hair as palpable relic, is lost in a photographic display. As I have argued elsewhere, by not displaying the hair, the USHMM has avoided the possibility of fetishizing it and re-victimizing the

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<sup>26</sup> Arnold Kramer, email to David Luebke, October 16, 1992, 3.43 Branding and Shearing (processing the victims) (text) file, USHMM Institutional Archives, accession no. 1998–38.1, box 12, Exhibitions, Curator's P. E. Segment Files, 1990–4.

victims. But in doing so its planners have also “chosen representation over presentation,” reducing the object to an image of the object that weakens the power the authentic artifact would have carried (Stier 2003:42–3).

Following the hair mural, it is not long before we re-enter the “Tower of Faces,” one level down and a world away, as we realize what happened to nearly 1000 residents of Ejszyski, now described as the “end of a shtetl.” A room off to the left serves as a memorial space to the residents of Ejszyski.

The final floor of the PE features displays on resistance, rescue, and liberation; though much of the material reveals human beings in remarkable acts of courage and agency, none of it shows Jews as distinctively Jewish, in any of the three positive senses outlined earlier. Only in the final segments, which document emigration to the US and, especially, Israel, does a sense of Jewishness, in this case, national Jewish identity, emerge more clearly. A facsimile of Israel’s Declaration of Independence, for example, unfurled and in Hebrew, a visible, material response to both the Torah scroll fragments and the intact Book of Esther encountered earlier, appears here, followed by an amphitheater whose walls are faced with distinctive Jerusalem stone. On the way out, one walks by a casting of a wall from the Rema synagogue cemetery in Cracow, built out of tombstone fragments that had been intended for use by the Nazis elsewhere.

I would like to conclude, however, with reference to one more object, not in a display case but actually buried, to complete a trilogy with the visible, resolved burial of the Torah scrolls and the partially visible, partially unresolved burial of the hair. In something of a post-script to the PE, the standard visitor’s tour through the USHMM ends in the hexagonal Hall of Remembrance, whose six sides echo, for some, the six points of a Jewish star, and in which visitors are welcome to light memorial candles (a particularly, though not exclusively, Jewish act made accessible for everyone). Underneath the eternal flame in the Hall (echoing the “*ner tamid*,” or eternal flame, present in the synagogue) lies soil gathered from “thirty-nine different Holocaust sites, as well as soil from Arlington National Cemetery” (Linenthal 1995:104). Were the soil to contain actual bone fragments, its presence could present a problem to some Jews — Cohanim, as we learned

above — who would be forbidden to enter a room containing human remains in the same manner that they are legally prevented from entering a cemetery (ashes — totally burned human remains — do not pose a halakhic problem, precisely because they are totally burned). In actuality, museum planners once more displayed sensitivity to any potential halakhic exclusion, in the form of consideration for any class of visitors who might feel excluded from the museum (Cohanin, in this case), by emphasizing that what would be gathered and buried here is “soil,” not human remains. Indeed, as Michael Berenbaum recounts, while an invitation to participate in an official museum delegation visit to Eastern Europe suggested the group would collect bones and ashes, and while the report on the expedition in the USHMM’s Newsletter of July/August 1992 mentions gathering “the first bit of soil at the mass grave of 6,000 victims” in Budapest (USHMM Newsletter 1992:2), museum planners quickly adjusted the language of subsequent public statements to make no mention of mass graves, bones, ashes — anything that could become problematic for a specific group of potential museum visitors. By the time of the report on the Western European delegation’s collection expedition (see USHMM Newsletter 1992/1993:1,6) and the subsequent account of the “consecration” of the Hall of Remembrance, the language referred exclusively to “soil”: “Signaling the symbolic completion of America’s national Holocaust memorial, soil from 39 concentration camps, ghettos, killing centers, villages, and U.S. military cemeteries was recently co-mingled in the base of an eternal flame which will burn in the Museum’s Hall of Remembrance in homage to the victims of Nazi tyranny” (USHMM Newsletter 1993:2). This act of re-burial, in a space marked as vaguely Jewish, presents an interesting counterpoint to both the visible burial of the Torah scroll fragments viewed earlier in the PE and to the unresolved burial of hair. It is further reinforced by an internal memorial event about which visitors are likely unaware: the burial under the Hall of Remembrance (then still under construction) on April 17, 1990, of two containers (see figure 4), designed to echo the milk cans famously used by the Oneg Shabbos archive organized in the Warsaw Ghetto by historian Emmanuel Ringelblum (one of the key heroes of the USHMM staff) to preserve records of all aspects of Jewish life under the Nazi regime. These containers hold scrolls of

remembrance signed by Holocaust survivors. These burials are themselves repetitions, of a sort, of an October 16, 1985 ceremony at the official groundbreaking of the Museum, at which members of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council reportedly mixed soil from the camp sites of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Theresienstadt and Treblinka, as well as the Warsaw Jewish cemetery, into the new building's foundation (see figure 5). Indeed, the entire complex of burial and reburial of objects during the war (to save them) and after the war (to lay them to rest) requires more analysis than I have space for here.

### **Conclusion**

As we have seen, museum planners did grapple with the manner and degree of Jewish representation at the museum, and potential Jewish sensitivities, halakhic and otherwise, in visiting the USHMM. Throughout, there were advocates for a more “Jewish” museum and a more “American” (read: not marked as Jewish) museum. Divided into two, the former group included many survivors, but others expressed concern that such a move would “diminish the public stature of the Museum and limit its attractiveness for non-Jewish visitors. They were afraid that a ‘Jewish museum’ close to the National Mall might be regarded by the public as inappropriate or that it would arouse envy and resentment among other ethnic groups. Some influential senior staff members, Jewish and non-Jewish, further thought that the Museum’s mission was of universal rather than of specifically Jewish character, and that this universal mission needed to be made explicit in the Museum’s public image” (Weinberg and Elieli 1995:166–8). Curiously, this argument echoes precisely the kind of case made, during the war itself, for American isolationism and non-involvement and, even after Pearl Harbor and Normandy, for a downplaying of the “Jewish” aspect, lest people think the U.S. was going to Europe to rescue its Jews. And it is fair to say that, since the USHMM’s opening, other ethnic groups have indeed leveraged their “envy” towards the construction of the National Museum of the American Indian and progress on the National Museum of African American History and Culture, both constituents of the Smithsonian Institution. This would suggest that many people “in the street” do perceive the USHMM as



*Figure 4.* Bud Williams, supervisor of construction at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, buries two symbolic milk cans beneath the Hall of Remembrance on April 17, 1990. Each milk can, on which is written “Remember 6,000,000” in Hebrew, Yiddish and English, contains a pledge of remembrance signed by Holocaust survivors. Copyright Alan Gilbert Photography ([www.photopian.com](http://www.photopian.com)).

Jewish. Indeed, Berenbaum recalls that there were at least three distinct points of view represented in the course of internal Museum planning discussions: “those who feared that an explicitly Jewish museum would alienate potential visitors; those who felt quite comfortable that the Museum could be both Jewish and American; and those who wanted it to be exclusively Jewish, at least with regard to the victims.”<sup>27</sup> In published reflections on this issue, Berenbaum downplays the binary opposition between the Jewish and American (i.e., unique vs. universal) aspects of the Museum, suggesting that a range of perspectives between these poles can be and is ultimately presented at the USHMM (see Berenbaum 1990:17–32).

In the end, the planners worked with the implicit understanding that the museum would be both Jewish and American, thus satisfying both constituencies. But I would suggest that the resultant hybrid, though

<sup>27</sup> Michael Berenbaum, email communication with the author, July 30, 2009.



*Figure 5.* Members of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council mix soil from Holocaust sites into the Museum's foundation during its official groundbreaking ceremony on October 16, 1985. Pictured from left to right are: Miles Lerman, Elie Wiesel, Sigmund Strochlitz, Hadassah Rosensaft, Senator Robert Dole, and Benjamin Meed (kneeling). Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

arguably necessary to achieve a careful balance, detracts from both aspects: its positive Jewish character (cultural, national, and religious) is too understated, nostalgic, and/or encoded — it is too *contained* — while its Americanness remains awkward, a frame imposed on a European narrative so as to impress the typical visitor with its relevance. That the Museum has nevertheless succeeded in making itself relevant in this way is a testament to its quality and to the force of that argument; I think it also means the museum is not perceived as being “too Jewish” by the general public. For those in the know, whether through personal knowledge of halakhah, awareness of elements of Jewish material culture, or rarefied knowledge of the inner debates about display strategies and sensibilities, the museum should get high marks for its sensitivity to and awareness of specifically Jewish concerns.

In the end, those who recognize the codes of the different types of positive Jewish identity will find them at the USHMM. For them, the space of the museum will consequently resonate as sacred on a specifi-



cally Jewish level. But for most others, the vast majority, these various ways of being Jewish remain too well encoded and discrete to be deciphered by the typical visitor, whose sense of the museum's Jewish components consequently will diminish, and with it, any sense of the specifically sacred nature of USHMM space. That is not to deny, however, that many visitors will find the USHMM, especially its Hall of Remembrance, sacred in a more generic and/or civil religious sense, or that the same visitors would not respond humanistically to the display of the Torah scrolls and other Jewish artifacts (thus reinforcing the "universal" message of the Museum). For a Jew, entering the Vishniac room can be akin to a religious experience: she might touch her fingers to the mezuzah case and kiss them, examine the Hebrew calligraphy on the Scroll of Esther, and gaze wistfully at the photos of religious Jews in pre-war Eastern Europe. But for others, this odd, different room offers little to connect it, and its viewers, to the various representations of Jewish identity in the rest of the museum, in which Jewish artifacts are nonetheless carefully and respectfully displayed behind glass. In the end, Jewish relics remain contained at the USHMM, protected from re-desecration, but also, perhaps, preserved from symbolic re-integration into Jewish and non-Jewish life through imagination and identification.

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## Book Reviews

*Ninian Smart on World Religions*. Edited by JOHN J. SHEPHERD. Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. Vol. 1: *Religious Experiences and Philosophical Analysis*. lxxv + 344 pp. ISBN 978-0754640806; Vol. 2: *Traditions and the Challenges of Modernity*. xx + 406 pp. ISBN 978-0754666387.

Ninian Smart (1927–2001) is without any doubt one of the most prominent representatives of the Study of Religions in the English speaking world. He was Professor at the universities of Lancaster in the U.K. and of Santa Barbara in the USA. He travelled a lot, gave numerous lectures in all continents and took actively part in many conferences. His list of publications embraces more than 300 papers and covers a great variety of subjects ranging from particular religions to comparative and methodological questions, from philosophical to ethical and educational issues. It is certainly no exaggeration to say that Religious Education in the U.K. is mainly based on his ideas and proposals.

To study his contribution to our discipline more closely and in a consistent way, it is good and helpful to have a collection of his main arguments and claims as now published by John J. Shepherd in two volumes subdivided into the following thematic topics: in volume 1 Religious Experience and the Logic of Religious Discourse; Mystical Experience; Comparative Studies; Religious Studies and Religious Education: Method and Theory in the Study of Religions; and Religious Ethics and in volume 2 Individual Traditions (i.e. Buddhism, Hinduism, Chinese Religions/Worldviews, Christianity, Islam, Shamanism, New Religious Movements); Worldview Analysis: Religions in the Modern World; Christian Theology of Religions and Interfaith Dialogue; Plurality of Religions: Religious Interpretations; Plurality of Religions: Ethico-Political Implications; and Conclusion. Both volumes together are an excellent and highly innovative selection of texts.

Smart is a Scottish Episcopalian whose vision is briefly summed up in the conclusion as follows:

I see the heart of the Christian faith as lying in the Trinity, with the Father suffering through the Son, and vivifying the living world through the Spirit.

Above all, the Creator knows that freedom involves suffering and She suffers with the cosmos.

I see the heart of Buddhism as diagnosing our troubles in the world as arising through greed, hatred and delusion (so much more realistic than the mythology of the Fall).

I see the heart of Hinduism as seeing the cosmos as God's body.

I see the heart of liberalism as knowing that we may be mistaken, and so being tolerant.

I see the heart of life as creative love.

Above all our ultimate vision has to focus on our planet as a whole: our ultimate concern must focus on humanity (and beyond that living beings) as a whole. (Vol. 2, p. 341)

One consequence of this vision is that "to suppose that we alone have the truth is crazy." (*ibid.*)

The present selection of texts is a most inspiring introduction to Smart's arguments, research results and claims and thus an excellent basis for researchers and students to discuss the different issues of the Study of Religions as a discipline competently in a scholarly and horizon widening way. The two volumes can serve as a textbook for seminars and academic discussion rounds to make the participants familiar with the most important topics of the discipline as Ninian Smart has always wished to do it.

Peter Antes

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*Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice.* By KATHRYN MCCLYMOND. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0801887765.

McClymond's volume is a welcome offer to mediate between competing "theories of sacrifice." For this reason, she begins with a roll call of "major" (i.e., much discussed) scholarly positions, noting some of the limitations of each. "Theories" of cultural phenomena (and cultural theory in general) have a strong tendency to solipsism. The theorizing process produces its own object. There is no "sacrifice" as a comparative category until certain criteria of abstraction are applied. Almost all discussion in Europe and America has begun with either Judeo-Christian or Greco-Roman examples, which present themselves as belonging to the same category because of a linguistic convergence mediated by Christian discourse. It is by selecting one or another feature of sacrifice in one or more of these traditions and generalizing from it that other practices have come under the analytical category of sacrifice. E. E. Evans-Pritchard's study of "Nuer sacrifice" is a classic example of this tendency.

Vedic sacrifice became the first non-Western tradition to be presented as an analogue. Here too, conventions of translation have steered the theorizing. *Yajña* has conventionally been translated "sacrifice", but "worship" or "act of worship" is really more appropriate. There are many other terms that overlap the semantic range of "sacrifice": *homa/havana* and the related verb *hu-* refer directly to the pouring or placing of offering substances in the fire; *medha* denotes both the fat or marrow of an animal, and the ritual offering thereof. A host of other terms refer particular aspects of ritual practice or observance in general (*karman*, *adhvara*, *kalpa*, *saṁsthā*).

In any case, McClymond accepts the comparative category of sacrifice heuristically, and lays out in Chapter 1 a number of basic "elements of sacrifice" which are all acts performed on the victim: selection, association with a deity, identification with the sponsor of the rite, killing, heating, apportionment, and consumption (not all of which need to be present to constitute a sacrifice). She emphasizes that, rather than "circumscribing sacrifice with one...oversimplistic metaphor (such as death or a meal)" as other theorists do, hers is a "polythetic approach" that "characteriz[es] sacrificial events as clusters of different types of activities," and thus "honors the complexity of sacrificial activity without being overwhelmed by it" (34). The chapter concludes with very brief overviews of Vedic and Jewish sacrifice.

Chapter 2 calls into question the traditional assumption that the killing of an animal is the central act of a sacrifice. She reviews Vedic and Jewish

examples to attempt to show that even where killing is involved, it is not (ever?) the central element, but is overshadowed by other factors such as selection and apportionment, which “indicate the personality and purpose of each sacrifice” (59). She suggests that the circumstance that Vedic ritual avoids the spilling of blood when the animal is killed (by suffocation) shows that killing is being deemphasized. She does not consider, though, that this mode of killing, together with the euphemistic term (*śam-*, to “quiet”) used to allude to it, actually reflects a profound discomfort (and therefore preoccupation) with the killing of the animal.

The debate over the centrality of killing the victim is thrown into relief in Chapter 3, which discusses “vegetal offerings as sacrifice.” In both Vedic and Jewish ritual, nonmeat offerings are prescribed alongside animal offerings or independently. McClymond treats these too as sacrifices, since many aspects of the ritual format are similar to those of animal sacrifices. She is surely right to treat these as analogous ritual acts in most respects, and her claim is uncontroversial unless one wishes to reserve the term “sacrifice” to animal offerings by definition. As she observes, the Vedic “vegetal” materials are often spoken of as being killed, which would seem both to assimilate them to animal offerings (reinforcing her thesis on this point) but also to do so by underlining the element of killing.

Chapter 4, on “liquid sacrificial offerings,” compares Vedic offerings of hot milk and the soma drink with Judaic offerings of blood. Here the argument becomes a bit sophistic. In order to reaffirm her view that killing is not central to sacrifice, she argues that blood and soma juice are oblations that are not “killed”: that is, the “host” or “container” (the animal and the soma stalk, respectively) is killed, but the liquid which is the principal offering is not. However, as even she notes (119; cf. 105 on *soma*), the blood is not merely a substance contained in an animal, but the animal’s life itself, its essence, so to speak. And in the Veda, the identity of the soma plant is wholly merged with its sap; the word *soma* in fact means “expressed juice”. Since the pressing of the plant stalks is deliberately homologized to killing in the ritual codes, it makes little sense to insist that the juice itself is not killed.

Moreover, McClymond’s choice of “heating” as one of the basic elements of sacrifice (an unfortunate inheritance, it seems, from Walter Kaelber) is too narrow. Where fire is involved, that sounds fine, but many seemingly sacrificial traditions make do without it (e.g., Nuer sacrifices as described by Evans-Pritchard). She goes through some contortions (e.g., 80, 127–28) to present certain ritual manipulations as “heating.” Why not speak rather of *preparation* of the materials (which might include heating)?

Chapter 5 recapitulates and emphasizes points made earlier on the importance of apportionment of offering materials for understanding the distinctive meaning and purposes of particular sacrificial rites. McClymond uses the conclusion to broaden the scope from “traditional” (i.e., ritual) sacrifices to “metaphorical” forms. This is a vast topic, and she limits herself to a few suggestive examples.

As a set of reflections aimed at stimulating further research, this book is potentially fruitful. In that spirit, I would add, not merely as a response to McClymond but to the “theory of sacrifice” debate in general, that the subject has been plagued by a failure to begin comparative study of sacrifice by situating it first within a comparative model of ritual (thereby identifying what distinguishes sacrifice from other forms of ritual, and from other modes of offering in particular).

Finally, among the reasons why she chose Jewish and Vedic sacrifice as her chief frame of reference here were their antiquity and the complexity and sophistication both of the rites and of the traditional exegeses thereon. She notes that there has been “no major study” comparing the two traditions since Hubert & Mauss (19–20). However there has been one *minor* study, by this reviewer (*Numen* 49[4] [2002]:427–59). For the reasons I presented there, these two traditions are similar in a large number of crucial respects, and precisely for this reason not necessarily representative of sacrificial traditions more broadly.

With these caveats, I applaud the author for steering readers away from the totalizing, overly reductive models (“theories”) of sacrifice that have dominated the conversation till now, and for calling attention to the range of interwoven factors at work in sacrificial practices.

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*Religion and the Discourse on Modernity.* By PAUL FRANCOIS TREMLETT. London and New York: Continuum, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8264-9823-6 (hbk.).

Early on in this book, the author notes that “Postmodernism is a body of theory rarely dealt with in systematic fashion in the study of religions” (13). That is certainly right and perhaps even better for that because the study of religion has enjoyed more than a fair share of nonsense when it has come to method and theory. And, Tremlett’s book is just about that: the lessons to be learnt from what we could call “pre-modern” nostalgic scholarship in religion as well as from post-modern theorizing. Wisely, in the opinion of this reviewer, Tremlett ventures beyond postmodernist theorizing because as he states in the preface: “I will argue that the post-modern refusal to commit to any substantial body of values apart from critique means that it offers no grounds whatsoever for guiding future research in the study of religions” (viii). Beyond the “Preface,” Tremlett offers an almost 30-page “Introduction” to positions of a number of scholars of religion, the “discourse on modernity” and “post-modernism as a critique of modernity”. Jürgen Habermas’ “affirmation of the emancipatory contents of modernity” is chosen as the point of departure for the remainder of the book and its “re-thinking” theory and method in the study of religion. In Chapter 1, “Re-Thinking Reductionism,” the old and worn story of the *faux pas* of the study of religion is rehearsed once more: the phenomenology of religion is associated with the names of Edmund Husserl and Wilhelm Dilthey. The rest of the “religion is *sui generis*” story continues with protagonists such as Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade. More interestingly, Tremlett identifies these scholars as “examples of positioning specific to a discourse” that he categorizes as “the aesthetic critique of modernity” (67). The following chapter on “Postmodernism and the Study of Religion” centers on Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Michel de Certeau in interesting examples and discussions of scholarly probity versus post-modernists’ “nihilistic journey into irrationality” (89). Chapter 3, “Critical Theory” takes off with the confrontation between phenomenology and post-modernism but otherwise contains an appealing argument in favour of critical theory as developed by Jürgen Habermas. The ensuing view of religions as ideologies appears promising (to this reviewer) when discussed in relation to method (Tremlett presents recent work of the anthropologist Maurice Bloch as an example). The last chapter, “Conclusions”, presents Tremlett’s own fieldwork in the Philippines and contains valuable reflections — before ending somewhat abruptly.

The ambiguities arising from looking at the title and the back cover notes may keep some prospective readers from picking up the book. That they



should not, but they must be prepared for a somewhat onerous task even in spite of the modest size of the book (128 pp. plus notes and bibliography). The notes on the back cover are unfortunately somewhat nebulous as one may easily get the impression that Tremlett endorses postmodernism as the new royal road for the study of religion. That he does not, as we have seen, but this only becomes clear after having carefully followed his arguments through the book, which finishes unexpectedly and without really delivering what could resolve the promise of the idea given earlier, that is: “to make a discriminating scholarship about religions, able and willing to make judgments not only about the veracity of the claims of other scholars, but also regarding those about whom we write...” (ix). This statement is interesting and implies a critique not only of inadequate scholarship but also of both religion and ideology as it is a time-honoured practice in the history of religions to abstain from value-judgments of the religions studied.

It is no secret that the study of religion (in singular and in general) and religions (in the plural) has been a muddled affair and so one is but to welcome young scholars who strive to set matters more straight and contribute to the development of an epistemological footing and equally adequate methodological reflections for the field. It is not entirely clear who are the guardian spirits that he invokes for assistance. The cover, preface, and his notes are sprinkled with such names as Habermas, Derrida, Foucault, Ricoeur, de Certeau and Freud which may put off readers with an interest in the theories and methods, more than in general “critical theory” and most of the critical voices from within and around the study of religions are not present. So who are the players on the “home” and “away” teams? Rhetorically and in terms of the composition of the argument the setting of the stage indicates an uneven battle: The study of religion is represented the whole way through by the habitual batch of “phenomenologists of religion” who have the honour of generally representing the practitioners of the study of religion(s). This is not entirely fair, to say the least, but very selective and it serves a specific task, for as Tremlett says: “I ‘read’ the phenomenology of religion as an instance of the aesthetic critique of modernity that critiques modernity as the forgetting of the sacred, invoking nostalgia for authentic sociality...” (vii). The first team is composed of Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Ninian Smart who are characterized by the inability of the phenomenology of religion of “asking questions about its own operational concepts or critically reflecting on its own authorizing practices for establishing the truth of certain descriptions or evocations against or over other kinds of statements” (ix). Against this team is pitted another mainly consisting of the names already mentioned. It is, of course, an uneven match, for the “phenomenologist” have

little support outside select, congregation-like circles and the theoreticians noted are recognized in each their own way (however, one may doubt Freud's status today) and have contributed essentially to developments in the human and social sciences. Their influence on the study of religion has been more marginal, but that is, in my opinion as an historian of religions, mostly because their scope has been so markedly euro-centric. It is to Tremlett's merit that he demonstrates how their work may contribute to that of the scholar of religion. When that is said, one could also have envisaged a book that was an easier read for students while retaining the critical insights and so perhaps make a greater impact and present a more balanced coverage. Not least must the reader wonder what has happened to the "internal debate" over the phenomenology of religion as the general and comparative study of religion, and where are the critical voices present in debates in journals and conferences, for instance, where are such theoreticians (indigenous to the study of religion) as Jonathan Z. Smith, Bruce Lincoln, Hans Kippenberg, Tomoko Masuzawa, Donald Wiebe, or Benson Saler (to mention a few). Some, like Hans H. Penner and Russell McCutcheon do receive (marginal) attention, whereas Nietzsche has a full column in the index. However interesting, the work remains a lopsided treatment and as Tremlett must have wished it. It is no great challenge these days to peruse the few journals that make up the theoretical forum in the study of religion. There one will find that the study of religion today is much more sophisticated and reflective than in the version caricatured by Tremlett. In Chapter 1, "Re-Thinking Reductionism" there are no references to the debates over this issue in the study of religion during the last few decades but copious discussions of Nietzsche and Marx. Tremlett seems much more at home in anthropology — which is not a problem in itself, quite the contrary given all that the study of religion has learned from anthropology, but if you wish to criticize another discipline, then the first requirement is that you know it *really* well and Tremlett gives the impression sometimes of not quite fulfilling that requirement.<sup>1</sup>

In other places one can doubt whether he wishes to make a contribution as a critical scholar or to be a critical intellectual. The work is methodological and so obviously full of normative evaluations of what scholars should do and not do. It is not always clear when we deal with methodological or with moral normativity. The difference is not insignificant: the question is whether

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<sup>1</sup>) Had I been his supervisor he should have mentioned Kurt Rudolph's "Basic Positions of Religionswissenschaft", *Religion* 11 (1981):97–117. See also Jeppe Sinding Jensen & Luther H. Martin (eds.), *Rationality and the Study of Religion*, London: Routledge, 2003.

you want to change society or change the study of religion. Tremlett seems to want both: Practical, partisan and activist scholarship and not just scholarship (128). On his homepage with the “Critical theory of religion” we get this unambiguous statement:

Religious studies has for too long been dominated by a so-called phenomenology of religion saturated with crypto-fascism and a philological approach that, in its claim to be able to know and lay bare the meanings of texts, hides behind a naive positivism that ignores the agency of interpretive communities in order to preserve itself from recognizing reading to be an historically situated mode of production. As such, I am interested in developing an approach to the historical conjunctions of religion, culture and society that is informed by values pertaining to social justice, political freedom and human autonomy.<sup>2</sup>

A final remark: if one wants to do “phenomenology” and make “religious experience” the theoretical object of study, then there is no way around the cognitive science of religion, now that it has been amply demonstrated that first person experiential authority is invalid as evidence and in that sense the phenomenology of religion is stone dead.<sup>3</sup> The other sense of phenomenology, i.e. the earlier one denoting a general and comparative study of religion, whether pursued by anthropologists, sociologists, historians and others may certainly gain some relevant and critical insights from Tremlett’s little book. When you have collected the “juicy bits” and reached the end of the book you get a depiction of a possible post-post-modern, let us call it a “neo-modernist” study of religion...

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<sup>2</sup>) See: [www.criticaltheoryofreligion.org](http://www.criticaltheoryofreligion.org).

<sup>3</sup>) Tremlett’s dislike of the cognitive science of religion is evident: “But the so-called cognitivists seem intent on returning to some naïve idea of scientific enquiry as entirely free from pre-judice...” (129, n. 3).

*Le Monde amérindien au miroir des Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*. By ADRIEN PASHOUD. (Coll. Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 2008:07.) Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2008. 229 pp. ISBN: 978-072409353.

Beneath the seemingly transparent title of Adrien Paschoud's book lies a complex nexus of issues to which the word "mirror" provides a veiled reference in the form of a subtle *clin d'oeil*. Indeed, the book is, first, a highly aware inquiry into the mirroring effects of Jesuits' representation of the Amerindian world in the 18th century through the well-known *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*. Further, the "mirror"-principle, a central conception of classical epistemology, applies to the conception of language sustained by the Jesuits (words imply a straight correspondence with things) and their conception of reality (the visible world mirrors the invisible and transcendent realms of the divine). Moreover, the concept of the mirror-image also hints at another reflection between Europe and the New World, in that the American "savage" appears as the counterpart of the 18th century libertine free-thinkers, both being likewise led astray from the truth of the Scripture. From another angle, the Amerindian world may be regarded as an image of the primitive Christian church, in so far as the Amerindian converts mirror the first Christian community described in the Gospel. In this perspective, the famous "*cités idéales*" called "*reductions*" — these communities isolated from the outside world, founded and led by the Jesuits — are presented to the European reader as a perfectly inverted image of their own perverted civilization.

Being a construction of high rhetorical density, the multifaceted image of the Amerindian world accounted for in the *Lettres* might well be a deceiving reflection of the Amerindian world the Jesuits encountered. But, as I shall later point out, though misleading they might seem at first, and therefore appealing to methodological caution, these mirroring effects are not as deceiving as an overcritical reader would like them to be. Here lies the substance of the book's argument, which follows the arduous task of displaying the sometimes ambivalent richness and complexity of the *Lettres*, without yielding to either a naïve or on the contrary too abrasive reading of the texts.

The *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* represent a colossal editorial enterprise (thirty-four volumes published from 1702 to 1776) by which the Company of Jesus intended to address a wide readership, ranging from devout followers to the more literate and learned readers of the time, including on the one hand their correlative religionaries or their religious opponents like the Jansenists, and on the other hand Philosophers and free-thinkers. At a time when the Company's popularity was in severe decline, the collection offered an overview of the Jesuit worldwide apostolic activity.

The *Lettres*, which emanated from missionaries sent abroad, were submitted to a thorough editorial process taking into account the “horizon of expectations” of European readers. The editorial strategy applied to this body of letters follows the Aristotelico-Thomist ideals of conciliating faith and reason, affects and reflection through the Horacian double principle of *docere* and *placere*. Because of its plasticity and fragmentary structure, the epistolary genre — which goes back to the founding writings of Ignatius of Loyola — proves a very adequate literary medium to display varying ranges of tone according to the readership it addresses (the Ciceronian notion of *aptum*). Conjointly, it meets the epistemological and apologetical issues alternatively granted by the editors to the missionaries’ travel accounts.

The two polarities of the *Lettres*, namely the missionaries’ experience in the New World and the European debates dealt with through the editorial rewriting, provide the overall structure of Paschoud’s book. The first four chapters, in which the author applies an “internal” method of analysis, address the question of the production of the letters. In the last two chapters, Paschoud follows a contextual approach to examine the reception of the *Lettres*.

Within this framework of reflection, Paschoud first sets some careful remarks about the need to take into account the disparity of the textual material contained in the letters and pay attention to a certain (though tenuous) epistemic dimension that the apologetic discourse, substantially informed by recurring tropes, does not conceal completely. Chapters I and II deal specifically with ethno-historical questions which might be summed up as follows: What did the missionaries see? How — with which acuteness and in what words — did they transcribe their experience? Jesuits tended to comprehend the Amerindian “fact” within a global category. As such, Tupi-Guarani, Jivaro, Illinois, Iroquois natives from the southern areas of the Paraguay to the cold deserts of New France, all stood for the “primitive, illiterate, artless, faithless and lawless” stage of humanity. However, discrete descriptions give access to a more acute perception of the actual Amerindian world which the modern scholar may classify according to anthropological categories. Doing so, one can ascribe to the *Lettres*, as Claude Lévi-Strauss once did in *Tristes Tropiques* with 16th century Jean de Léry’s *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*, a proto-ethnographical value.

Paschoud gathers in chapter I material relevant to the crucial *topos* of the Amerindians’ permanent “State of War” that led to the anthropophagic ceremonies missionaries were horrified to witness. Applying a methodology that will prove extremely efficient throughout the book, the author alternates between minute textual analyses of the *Lettres* related to the *Ancien Régime*’s cultural context (religious, scientific, ideological, etc.), and present-day

ethno-historical data on the Amerindian socio-cultural systems. The Amerindian political model obviously appears undecipherable for the missionaries; they explain the horrifying permanent violence of the *sauvages* by their immoderate passions and do not grasp the system of inter-tribal reciprocal relationship. Here, Paschoud brilliantly argues, the epistemological pattern Jesuits obey to needs to be underlined, since it reflects theological presuppositions and intertextual discussions with thinkers from Greek and Roman Antiquity, Aristotle in the first place. By giving accounts of the Indian natives' violence, they testify to a specific taste for rare and remarkable facts, facts that might draw the attention of scholars and feed the debates on the State of Nature, the origin of mankind and society. This taste for "*curiositas*," to use Thomist terminology, links Jesuit epistemology with the 17th century rather than with the history of ideas of the 18th century.

Paschoud explores in depth these epistemological issues in chapter II, which is dedicated to the Amerindian beliefs. In a similar manner, Jesuit missionaries misunderstand the 'regime of historicity' of the Indians and their magico-religious conception of reality. For the Jesuits, they are the illustration of a primitive humanity bearing evidence of the original divine revelation (what they called "*consentement universel*"). The unknown world can thus be read as in an open book and the diffusionist model proposed by the Jesuits explains that the Savages, led astray by the Devil, can be converted again to the Gospel. Nevertheless, as equivocal, predetermined and oriented as might seem the Jesuit discourse, the *Lettres*, Paschoud argues in his very insightful textual analyses, show at times evidence of a lucid understanding of Amerindian rituals and of the activity of the shamans. The author demonstrates here that these descriptions are devoid of the axiology and enunciative modalisation one could expect of the Jesuit observer.

Following up on his remarks about the heterogeneity of the *Lettres*, Paschoud goes further into his inquiry on the experience of the missionaries in chapter III, which focuses on the apostolic activity. Though the scope of this chapter seems at first to be less defined than the two previous ones, it turns out to shed light both on the heuristic dimension of the Jesuit way of thinking and, symmetrically, on the perception of the missionaries and of their message by the indigenous populations. Finding support in the apostle Paul, who claimed to be "Greek among the Greeks", the Jesuits, when facing the unknown other, apply a "principle of adaptation": they learn indigenous languages, comply with local rules and rites, pay expected tributes and even change identity according to initiation rituals. Symmetrically, Amerindians seem to have attributed the missionaries' magico-religious powers due to the efficiency of their healing practices and medicine, for example, but most of

all due to their use of images — be they iconographical or mental — designed to teach and persuade the natives of the Gospel truths. Paschoud shows the discrepancy between the two visions of the world put into contact here. It appears that the message of the missionaries seems to have been diverted from its eschatological scheme and absorbed in the Amerindian “immanent” conception of reality, showing the Indians’ striking capacity of integration.

Throughout his study, Paschoud refers to recent reflections on the interaction of cultures through travel experiences and addresses both discursive and praxeological issues. In this way, he delineates in the entwined web of the *Lettres* the conditions of possibility of a “middle ground” (Richard White), a kind of common space where Jesuits and Amerindians could live temporarily together. Rare as they are, these spaces give way to a new perception of the content of the *Lettres* and lead directly to a highly controversial aspect of Jesuit practices in the 18th century history of colonization, the so-called “*reductions*” of the Paraguay (chapter IV).

These autonomous theocracies lasted from the beginning of the 17th century to the middle of the 18th century, gathering an amount of some 200,000 Indians according to the Company’s own archives. These communities, designed as self-contained worlds, stood outside Spanish colonial jurisdiction. Their conception was partly based on the Paulinian account of primitive Christian communities, the Platonic idea of the Republic and most presumably the utopian tradition from Thomas More in the 16th century to Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* and Fénelon’s *Aventures de Télémaque*. The presentation of the “*reductions*” — like all the material described above — is configured in the *Lettres* so as to give a myth-like image of the Jesuit apostolic activity. They do not only try to give the devout readership a stable apologetic idea of the Order, but also to address the harsh charges brought by the opponents of the Company. With the “*reductions*,” the Jesuits pledged against the accusation of growing richer at the expense of the Indians and showed — in a manner quite similar to that of the Philosophers — that the Amerindians provided the evidence of mankind’s innate religiosity, a religiosity concurring to the possible establishment of ideal societies governed by “divine law.” As such, the Amerindian world was intended to reflect, in an inverted manner, the contemporary *Ancien Régime* society who tended to discredit the Company.

In Chapter V, Paschoud symmetrically analyses the hagiographic discourse as a specific way to glorify the conversions: martyrdom, described in a sublime rhetoric, shows a specific scenography. The horrifying situation of the victim — Paschoud examines a letter narrating the execution of Indian converts by their own communities — is described in a way that proportionally

increases the spiritual potency of the scene and, hence, the apologetic efficiency of the narrative.

Ending this thorough exploration of the Amerindian world as seen through the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, Paschoud examines in Chapter VI the debate around the “réductions” in 18th century France and the reception of the *Lettres* by Philosophers such as Voltaire, D’Alembert, De Jaucourt and Diderot. Though they are generally inclined to anticlerical suspicion, the French Philosophers (who share some of the arguments held by the anti-Jesuits) read the accounts about the “reductions” with noticeable judgment and interest. It supplied them with a rich documentation for their own reflections on the pursuit of a collective happiness and aspirations for a perfect society. The “reductions” gave them a debatable model, a model whose particularity consisted in having actually been carried out. Paschoud’s discussion tends here to move away from the Amerindian world, and the chapter gives a complete and nuanced insight of the epistemological and ideological field of the time in *Ancien Régime* France.

The book sets forth to examine the specificity of this body of *Lettres* that have barely been reedited since the 18th century and have almost never been studied for themselves in an extended way. This unique comprehensive approach gives a definitively new perspective both on the *Lettres* and on the New World as seen by the Jesuits, since most of the recent reflection on the encounter of Europeans with the American natives is based on accounts of explorers or merchants and on the famous works of Joseph François Lafitau and of the baron of Lahontan. It then proves an irreplaceable counterpart due to the sources it brings into light as well as to the methodology it applies, which benefits from and extends in its own way previous researches, such as Michel de Certeau, Pierre Berthiaume, Anthony Pagden, Gordon Sayre and Richard White, to name but a few. Indeed, Paschoud always shows a profitably deep knowledge of both European and Amerindian contextual fields and a high awareness of the epistemological, ideological and, on a meta-theoretical level, methodological debates involved. In doing so, Paschoud combines in a most fruitful way multiple theoretical approaches — ranging from, e.g., literary analysis to ethno-history, anthropology, history of ideas, cultural studies and postcolonial studies. Moreover, Paschoud has a confident sense of argumentation and proves his impressive command of the complex questions addressed by the texts in an elegant and fluent style that makes the book very pleasant to read.

Paschoud’s *Monde amérindien au miroir des Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* is an erudite work of cultural history which offers both scholars and interested readers in the religious history of the 18th century and the history of travel a



comprehensive insight of the religious and philosophical background of the *Lettres*. At the same time, while Paschoud opens a pioneering methodological perspective on the conditions of possibility of an interaction between the missionaries and the American natives, he also examines the *conditions of experience* that are decipherable in the *Lettres*. He does so without turning blind on the intermittences of this encounter or on the rhetoric density of the textual material which is being accounted for here. Thanks to Adrien Paschoud's survey, the 21st century reader can perceive the reflections of the pretended faithful "mirror" the *Lettres* claimed to be in their full density and in view of their multifaceted epistemic implications.

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*Alternative Christs*. Edited by OLAV HAMMER. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 305 pp. ISBN 978-0521889025.

The book “Alternative Christs” collects 14 contributions, covering a wide range of conceptions of Jesus and/or Christ: from the Antiquity (Gnosis, apocryphal literature, Manichaeism) over non-Christian notions (Islam, Hinduism) to Christian positions in Early Modern and Modern Europe (alchemists, Christian cabalists, Swedenborg, Mormonism, Theosophy, Ariosophy, Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness, Aetherius Society). The articles, mostly written by experts in the respective fields, provide reliable information on often difficult subjects. In terms of the status of historical questions in the field of religion, this collection indicates a shift in religious studies, where scholars are analyzing more and more the European Christian Tradition, formerly being a dominion of Christian theology.

With regard to overall concept, the book is less convincing. The title “Alternative Christs” suggests the existence of a non-alternative conception of Christ, but there is no account given of the normative suppositions which qualify an “alternative” or a “non-alternative” position. Non-alternative might be a synonym for an “orthodox” Christology, but even the “orthodox” dogmata were always imbedded in a field of highly controversial debates. These disputes concerning alternatives within “non-alternative” Christian traditions are mostly missing in this book: e.g. the Oriental churches in late antiquity are not even mentioned, the debates in the western churches (e.g. on Arianism) are only hinted at in the introduction. In medieval and early modern western history, the situation is a similar one. Debates between these so-called alternative groups and the mainline churches or within the latter (e.g. Trinitarian debates) are absent. In my opinion, in religious studies we should not isolate — and thus: create — “alternative” positions, and we should connect more closely the (historical) subjects of theology.

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## Soul's Aitherial Abode According to the Poteidaia Epitaph and the Presocratic Philosophers

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### Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to explore the epitaph commemorating the warriors that fell at Poteidaia in 432 BCE. After looking briefly at the importance of the concept of *aither* in the history of ideas, I will then analyze the epitaph and its message. Moreover, some ideas of the early Greek philosophers and the tragedians upon the subject will be given. I will conclude that during the sixth and the fifth centuries BCE it was a common opinion to assert that the *aither*, the upper divine region of the atmosphere, was the dwelling place of the soul after the death of the body. Thus, the Archaic and Classical Greeks did not distinguish sharply between the realms of gods and men.

### Keywords

Pre-Socratics, Poteidaia, soul (*psuchê*), aither, fire, metempsychosis, shamanism

### Introduction

In 1887, Albert A. Michelson and Edward Morley at what is now Case Western Reserve University, proved that, in oversimplified terms, the *aither* is an unnecessary hypothesis if one wishes to explain the propagation of electromagnetic phenomena such as light and electricity. This is generally considered to be the first strong evidence against the theory of a “luminiferous aither,” that is the theory that all space is permeated by an elastic medium or *aither* through which Earth and light move.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>) For a full and systematic study on the concept of *aither* in physics see Whittaker 1910.

Some two hundred odd years earlier, in 1675, Isaac Newton, in his *Second Paper on Light and Colours*, introduced the notion of *aither* into physics as a condition for its intelligibility and not as a scientific theory: “Perhaps the whole frame of nature may be nothing but various contextures of some certain aitherial spirits... Thus perhaps may all things be originated from *aither*” (Gillispie 1966:129–130). Newton’s theory of *aither*, “a hermetic cosmogony in the language of science” (Vondung 1992:138), permeated all science and philosophy well into the nineteenth century. Thus, the concept of *aither* has been the basis of various fields of knowledge, such as psychology, physiology, cosmology and alchemy:

- a) *Psychology*: there is an aitherial body, which links the soul (*psuchê*) with the mortal body (the Neo-Platonists, Marsilio Ficino, the Cambridge Platonists);
- b) *Physiology*: *aither* is the subtle fluid in the nerves that gives the body motion and vitality;
- c) *Cosmology*: the *aither* represented the upper region of the air which extended from the part of the atmosphere which stretches beyond the humid nature of *aer* to the Moon and beyond (Pre-Socratics, Plato, Stoics and Epicureans) or it was identified only with the celestial realm, over against the sublunary realm, which contained the other four elements (Aristotle);<sup>2</sup>
- d) *Alchemy*: as a “fifth essence” or vital life energy, it was supposed to have the power to rejuvenate the old and to cure all kinds of illnesses. (Patai 1994:204)

Etymologically, the root of *aither* is *aithō*, ‘to burn, blaze,’ suggesting the sense of ‘pure or clear air.’ It is not only a *region* of the skies that surrounds the world — the highest and the purest part of the atmosphere (as it was for the natural philosophers up to the nineteenth century), but it is also a certain *condition* of the sky, its brightness and translucence (Kahn 1994:145). Thus, *aither* is to be distinguished from

<sup>2</sup>) See the comprehensive discussion of Aristotle’s fifth element in Paul Moraux (1963:1171–1266).

*aer*, the misty or vaporous air, the lower part of the air extending from Earth and up to and including the clouds (Hesiod, *Theogony* 125).<sup>3</sup>

In the following pages we will look at the meaning of the term *aither* in the Pre-Socratics<sup>4</sup> and the tragedians, with special attention to the epitaph of Poteidaia. We will try to show that the ancient Greeks did not hold such a sharp distinction between the realms of Gods and men as some classical scholarship makes us believe. Scholars have been overly reliant on the words of Pindar, “seek not to become god” (*Olympian Ode* 5.24) and of Homer, “the breed of immortal gods and of men who walk the ground is in no way alike” (*Iliad* 5.440–2) to prove that the Archaic and Classical Greeks did not know of an essential unity between the divine and the human spirit. Erwin Rohde went as far as to say that the gulf between the human and the divine was abyssal, and the idea of a unity between the two realms had to come from outside the Greek soil. Many scholars have agreed with this assessment, though Rohde’s theory that the conception of the immortality of the soul sprung from the Dionysian cult is no longer supported. In this paper I will try to show that there is no need to impose upon the early Greek mentality (or should we say mentalities?) a schema that is found only in a few disparate texts. Many passages by the same authors could be quoted to show the contrary view, *viz.* that gods and men are of one kind (Homer, *Odyssey* 36; *Homeric Hymn* 30; Aeschylus, *Danaids*, Fr. 44 Radt; Euripides, *Melanippe the Wise*, Fr. 484 Kannicht). Even Pindar, who was usually adamant regarding the distinction between gods and mortals, considers that gods and mortals are “of one kindred, one only” and “of one mother do we both draw our breath” (Pindar, *Nemean Ode* 6.1–6).

That the souls of men and women, after the death of the body, were said to share the abode of the gods is proof enough that the distinction was not as systematic as it is often believed.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, this shows also

<sup>3</sup>) For the difference between *aer* and *aither* in ancient Greece, see Peter Kingsley (1995:26–29) and P. Louis (1948:63–71).

<sup>4</sup>) Though I am aware of the difficulties inherent in this term, I am for the sake of simplicity still using the expression ‘Pre-Socratics’ to denote the early Greek Philosophers. On this issue, see Anthony Long (1999:5–15) and André Laks (2002:17–38).

<sup>5</sup>) This idea has been maintained by scholars such as Erwin Rohde, John Burnet, William K.G. Guthrie, and Jean-Pierre Vernant.

that the belief in the immortality of the soul was well established in the fifth century BCE, among some thinkers at least, if not among the general population.

### The Epitaph of Poteidaia

After this brief history of the concept of *aither* let us now look at its first use to denote the abode of the soul. We are fortunate enough to possess at least one first-hand document, a funeral inscription, dealing with this fundamental question. The epitaph, which may have been discovered in 1797 or 1802<sup>6</sup> (originally in the public cemetery in the Ceramicus and now in the British Museum) and first published by Ennio Q. Visconti in 1816 (Visconti 1816:177–205), reads:

*Aither has taken their souls, and earth their bodies.* They were undone around the gates of Poteidaia. Of their foes, some have their portion in the grave, others fled and made a wall their sure hope of life. This state and people of Erechtheus mourns its citizens who died in the front ranks, before Poteidaia, children of the Athenians. They cast their lives into the scales in exchange for valour, and their country's glory. (Peek 1955:8–9)

This inscription, which consists of twelve elegiac lines, served as an epitaph on the tomb of the 150 Athenian warriors killed in battle under the walls of Poteidaia in the year 432/1 BCE, at the commencement of the Peloponnesian war (Wade-Gery 1933:71–104; Oliver 1936:225–234; Bradeen 1969:45–159). Poteidaia was a town on the Thracian peninsula that paid tribute to Athens. Helped by Corinth, it revolted in the summer of 432/1 BCE. Consequently, Athens sent an expedition which gained a victory but lost the commander Callias and some of his men. This epitaph was erected in their honor.

Funeral epitaphs, of which Simonides (c. 556–468 BCE) was the acknowledged master, are the earliest type of epigrams. The funeral epitaph read at the gravesite and inscribed on the tomb was one of the

<sup>6</sup> On the date of its discovery and its uncertainty, see Anthony Raubitschek (1943: 20 ff.), who adopts the widely accepted date of 1797; and also, a year later, the same author (Raubitschek 1944:352), who proposes the date of 1802.



several stages of ancient Greek funerals. These were the *prothesis* (laying-out of the corpse); the *ekphora* (procession to the grave); the burial and the ritual mourning; the return from the grave and the funerary banquet (Kurtz and Boardman 1971:143–4). While the funerary epigrams were short and very concise in the archaic period (their chief function was to impart specific information about the deceased), by the late fifth century they had become longer and reflected various philosophical beliefs. These changes are due to the composition of the group which commissioned grave monuments, the influence of eschatological beliefs that can be attributed to mystery cults and sectarian groups, and the shift towards family, and family values (Sourvinou-Inwood 1996:203–204).

Here is not the place to discuss at any length the relation of the public funerary epigram and other genres of mourning in Ancient Greece, such as the *threnos* (performed by professional mourners), the *goos* (lament sung by relatives and close friends), the *kommos*, the *epikedeion* (uttered at the funeral while the body is exposed), the *elegos* (after-supper song) or the *epitaphios logos* or the funerary oration (Alexiou 2002:102–130). While the *threnos*, the *goos* and the *kommos* “were based,” says Margaret Alexiou, “on a ritual act or cry of lamentation” performed by the women, the epigram, the *elegos*, the *epikedeion* and the *epitaphios logos*, on the other hand, grew out of the men’s social and literary activity (Alexiou 2002:108). A word must, however, be said about the latter, since it is representative of the *Sitz im Leben* of our funerary epigram. The appearance of the *epitaphios logos* coincides with the emergence of the city-state or *polis* and was a product of literacy, taking the form of a written text. The first attestation of the *epitaphios* dates back to the fifth century, at the beginning of the Second Persian War (479 BCE). Diodorus Siculus tells us that in addition to holding funeral games (*agona ton epitaphion*) for the first time, the Athenians also “passed a law that laudatory addresses (*encomia*) upon men who were buried at the public expense should be delivered by speakers selected for each occasion” (11.33.3). Despite this testimony, Felix Jacoby dated the cult of the war dead and the *epitaphios logos* to 465/4 (Jacoby 1944:37–66). The *epitaphios* was originally a commemoration of those who had fallen in war, in the manner of the Poteidaia epitaph. Moreover, and this is one major aspect that distinguishes it from other ancient Greek laments, such as the *threnos*, the *epitaphios* is

identified in part with the tomb site.<sup>7</sup> In fifth-century Athens, public collective epitaphs were commemorating, through the fallen soldiers, the *polis* rather than the individual dead men. The Poteidaia epitaph, Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood remarks, “is the nearest fifth-century Athenian public collective epitaphs ever came to an expression of regret at the men’s death” (Sourvinou-Inwood 1996:193). On the other hand, in the private epitaphs we find expressions of regret and sorrow for the dead person and sometimes they contain also, as does our epitaph, hopes for the afterlife. This being said, the fifth-century Poteidaia epitaph is one of numerous grave epigrams (public or otherwise) that mention a celestial afterlife and a sojourn of the soul in the vicinity of the gods.<sup>8</sup>

The journey of the soul to the sky and the return of the body to the earth were explained in terms of their respective constitution. Due to its warm, fiery nature (Democritus, 68 A 102, A 106 DK; Hippasus, 18 A 9 DK; Heraclitus, 22 A 118 DK; Epicharmus, 23 B 48 DK;<sup>9</sup> and see below), the soul aspires towards the *aither*, which is fiery air, whereas the body, because of its telluric nature, rejoins the earth. In a play first staged in 432 BCE, around the same time as our epigram was composed, Euripides expresses the same popular idea (*Suppliants* 531–6, trans. F. M. Cornford):

Now let the dead be laid in earth, and each part return  
thither whence it came into the light of day, the breath  
into the aither of heaven, the body into earth. For the  
body is not ours in fee; we are but lifelong tenants;  
and after that, Earth that nursed it must take it back again.

Line 534 quotes almost literally the epigram commemorating the dead at Poteidaia: at the moment of death, each element returns to its dwelling place, “the breath into the *aither* of heaven, the body into earth.” We know that for Euripides, *aither* was divine and the stuff of which

<sup>7</sup> I forgo discussion of the *epitaphios logos* as a literary genre, civic discourse and male practice, which would in no way affect this argument, e.g. the eschatological message of the Poteidaia epitaph (Loraux 1981).

<sup>8</sup> See n. 23 for a list of some epitaphs.

<sup>9</sup> The numbers given to the Pre-Socratic fragments are from the 6th edition of Diels and Kranz 1985, conventionally abbreviated DK.

the soul is made. The world originated from the Earth and the “*aither* of Zeus.” Everything that is born must, when dead, return to its origin, the soul to the *aither*, the body to the soil. The pessimistic view of life that is expressed in some of his plays might hint at a consolation to come in the hereafter: “Who knows then whether life may not be death, and death life?” (Plato, *Gorgias* 492e). Moreover, we have a passage in which Euripides speaks of personal immortality. In the play *Helen*, Euripides says that “when people die, their mind does not live on, but it retains an immortal consciousness once it has merged with the immortal *aither*” (1013–1016)<sup>10</sup>. From this passage we gather that what lives on amidst the *aither* is the mind (*nous*) and its posthumous consciousness (*gnome*). This passage also echoes the doctrine of Anaxagoras, by whom Euripides was influenced (Parmentier 1892; Goossens 1962). According to Anaxagoras, mind (*nous*) “is the finest of all things and the purest” (59 B 12 DK). In addition, “mind is unlimited and independent and has been mixed with no thing but alone is itself by itself... mind controls all the things that have soul [*psuchê*], both the greater and the smaller” (*Ibid.*).

This passage also expresses well the ancient doctrine of *homoion-homoioi* or ‘like is known by like.’ According to Sextus Empiricus, “there is a common ancient view... about likes being capable of recognizing [*gnôristikai*] likes” (*Adv. Math.* 7.116–118). The earliest echo of this theory is found in Homer (*Od.* 17.218), who says that “as ever, God brings like and like together.” In the fifth century BCE, Empedocles (Aristotle, *De anima* 1.2.404b8 = 31 B 109 DK) says the following:

For it is with earth that we see earth; with water, water;  
with *aither*, divine *aither*; with fire, blazing fire;  
with love, love and with strife, baneful strife.  
For all are constructed and fitted together out of these,  
and it is with these that they think and feel pleasure and pain.

Many ancient sources used this passage to attribute a like-by-like doctrine to Empedocles. Like attracts like and like begets like. In his

<sup>10</sup>) Some scholars, who maintain that the Greeks held a rigid distinction between the realm of men and the realm of the gods, have opined that the passage is a later addition, not by Euripides and some have called it “eschatological mumbo jumbo” (Sansone 1985:27).

dialogue *Lysis* (214a2–e2), Plato echoes this principle when speaking about friendship: “God is ever drawing like towards like.” Empedocles had also said that, by the action of Love, things strive naturally for similar things: “the things that are more suitable for mixture are linked to one another and loved by Aphrodite” (31 B 22.4–5 DK). In its application to the theory of causality, Jonathan Barnes gave this principle the name ‘Synonymy Principle of Causation,’ explaining that “causes produce changes in the objects they affect by transferring or imparting something to those objects” (Barnes 1979:119). In other words, a cause can impart only what it itself has. Barnes finds this principle in Xenophanes, Alcmeon, Aristotle, and even Descartes. In his third *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (32) Descartes states the following:

Maintenant, c’est une chose manifeste par la lumière naturelle, qu’il doit y avoir pour le moins autant de réalité dans la cause efficiente et totale que dans son effet: car d’où est-ce que l’effet peut tirer sa réalité sinon de sa cause? et comment cette cause la lui pourrait-elle communiquer, si elle ne l’avait en elle-même. (Descartes 1978:40).

A common interpretation of the like-by-like principle is that sensation and thought are the same, that is, cognition is a purely physical process (Guthrie 1981:228). Thus, the theory of knowledge goes hand in hand with the theory of perception. Theophrastus, who quotes the last two lines of Empedocles’ fragment B 109 verbatim in section 10 of his *De sensibus*, attributes to Empedocles the like-by-like principle, and explains perception in terms of things ‘fitting in’ (*enharmottein*) with similar things:

Empedocles speaks in the same way about all the senses and says that we perceive by things fitting (*enharmottein*) into the pores (*poroi*) of each sense. That is why the senses cannot discriminate one another’s object; for the pores of some are too broad and of others too narrow relative to the percept, so that some slip through without touching and others cannot enter at all. (§ 7 = 31 A 86 DK, trans. J. Barnes)

In the aforementioned passage, Empedocles deals with thought and feeling rather than sense-perception, and it is Theophrastus himself who tries to extend the same principle to the senses (Sedley 1992:

20–31). The theory of the porosity of matter expounded here refers to the theory that there are films or effluences (*aporrhoiāi*) from all things that fit into the pores (Empedocles, 31 B 89 DK). According to some reports, Democritus also said that certain “*eidōla* fall on men and brute animals from the divine substance” (*apud* Clement, *Strom.* 88 = 68 A 79 DK). In this passage the *eidōla* are interpreted in the sense of effluences. Plato explained the mechanism of vision in the same way by saying that color is an effluence of things which is fitted to (*summetros*) sight and is perceptible (*Meno* 76c = 31 A 92). Like Empedocles (28 A 47 DK) and others after him (such as Heraclides, *apud* Aëtius, *Placita* 4.9.6 = Fr. 122 Wehrli), Plato links vision, sight, as well as taste, smell and hearing to the element of fire (Brisson 1999:147–176).

Now, the ‘like is known by like’ principle is an ancient one that was advocated by the Pre-Socratic tradition, and is found also in Plato’s *Timaeus* (37a2–c5). This is clear if we consider that in antiquity the soul was considered to be of the same substance as that of the gods. According to Aristotle, “the ancients assigned to the gods the heaven and the upper region as being the only immortal place” (*De caelo* 1.284a11).

### Types of Immortality

In classical Greece, public epitaphs stated that three types of immortality were conferred upon those who had died in war; later, this was extended to any other deceased person (Loraux 1981:28–30, 38–42, 116; Sourvinou-Inwood 1996:193–194; Currie 2005):

- a) *Civic immortality through glory*, that is, the perpetuation of the warrior’s ideal personality and name. The community of the *polis* or city-state will thus guarantee eternal memory to those who have given their lives for it. In an elegy of the seventh century BCE, Tyrtaeus says that any Spartan warrior who dies in battle will become “undying” or a hero and will be mourned and honored thereafter (Fr. 9.13–16 Gentili/Prato = Fr. 12 West): “But he who falls among the foremost fighters and loses his dear life in winning glory for his city and his fellow citizens and his father... he is lamented by young and old together, and the whole city mourns for him in sad

grief; and his tomb and his children are honoured among men and his children's children likewise and his whole race after him; never is his name and fair fame destroyed, but though he lies beneath the earth he becomes immortal" (trans. Jaeger 1966:103–142). This glory reaches the sky.

- b) *Heroization or deification* of the war dead, athletes and other deceased contemporaries. This is a very complex subject. Suffice it to say that according to Louis Gernet "les héros sont une espèce à part, entre les dieux et les hommes: ses représentants sont bien des hommes, mais des hommes qui, au delà de la mort, ont acquis une condition ou un statut suprahumain" (Gernet 1968:53).
- c) *Celestial immortality*. According to this conception of immortality, the soul returns to its divine home after the breaking of earthly bounds and thereafter dwells in the *aither* or fiery upper air.<sup>11</sup> The *aither* was regarded both as divine and as a place for the souls. The belief in the divinity of the *aither*, which is at least as old as Hesiod (*Theogony* 124f.), is found also in Euripides (*Helen* 1016) and in many early Christian writers, such as Athenagoras, Hippolytus, Pseudo-Clement and Origen (Moraux 1963:1227–1231). According to Pieter C. van der Horst, "la conception de l'âme allant dans l'éther après avoir été libérée par la mort, était sans doute répandue depuis très longtemps en Grèce...très probablement depuis le 5<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C. déjà" (Van der Horst 1932:70–71).

Of these various types of personal survival, I will here concentrate on the third, the passage of the soul, after the death of the body, from this realm to the sky, the upper region of the air, the *aither* (Bousset 1971; Boyancé 1952:312–349; Burkert 1972; Capelle 1917; Culianu 1984; Cumont 1949:142–188; Rohde 1925). Already in the time of Homer and Hesiod, Zeus was said to live in the *aither*: "Zeus, most glorious,

<sup>11)</sup> To mention only a few epitaphs, all taken from Peek 1955: 432 BCE: 20 (Athens, Ceramicus); 4th c. BCE: 1889 (Athens, Ceramicus); around 350 BCE: 1031 (Phrygia), 1702 (Athens), 1755 (Piraeus), 1757 (Athens); 300–250 BCE: 1759 (Athens); 1st c. BCE: 1297 (Naxos); 848 (Panticapaeum); 1st–2nd c. CE: 1971 (Athens); 2040 (Pergamon); 1978 (Corcyrus); 1979 (Thessalonica); 1993 (Lydia); 2026 (Thasos); 1595 (Rome); 2nd–3rd c. CE: 1903 (Megara); 1776 (Thasos); 1325 (Cyprus); 3rd–4th c. CE: 1169 (Rome).

most great, lord of the dark clouds who dwells in the *aither*” (Homer, *Iliad* 2.412; also *Iliad* 4.166; Hesiod, *Works and Days* 18). Sophocles, in his *Ajax* (1187–1197) also says that it would have been better for Ajax to have first “entered the boundless *aither*, or Hades, our universal home” than to have learnt the use of arms (Fairbanks 1901:431–432). As we will see, with the first philosophers of nature, the *aither* began to designate the spiritual and divine force in human beings, in contrast with the heavy materiality of the earth. Now, not only the gods but also human beings are lifted to the “folds of *aither*” (Euripides, *Menelaus* 605–6), something that was already suggested by the epic poets regarding such figures as Menelaus and Hercules. After death, the soul returns to the sky to live in or to be dissolved into its fatherly substance, the *aither* (Euripides, *Menelaus* 605–607).

### The Concept of *aither* in the Pre-Socratic Philosophers

We encounter the idea of an aithereal dwelling of the soul after death in the works of various philosophers and tragedians of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. I begin with the truism that in the ancient authors under study, empirical (“scientific”) and metaphysical methods always remain intertwined. Moreover, the literary structure and the conceptual structure are never separated. Let us remark, without entering into this debate, that in order to understand an ancient author, particularly the Pre-Socratics of whom we are left with only quotations, paraphrases and reports in later literature (mostly after the first century CE, hence more than five hundred years later), their original works being lost, one has to take into consideration the language in which a testimony is articulated, since the attitude or purpose of a discourse determines the content of the doctrine that is expressed in it.<sup>12</sup> Hence, not only do we have to explain the particular testimony regarding the soul and its destiny into the netherworld, but also the manner in which it is conveyed must be explained.

<sup>12</sup>) Aristotle classified discourse according to its particular *telos* (*Rhetoric* 1.1358a35–1358b7 and 1358b21–28).

Pherecydes of Syros,<sup>13</sup> Anaximander<sup>14</sup> and Anaximenes (both from Miletus) assumed that they could convey the real nature of the world in prose, and were in this respect followed by Anaxagoras of Klazomenai, Diogenes of Apollonia, Democritus of Abdera, and even Heraclitus of Ephesos with his enigmatical and antithetical style of prose. On the other hand, Xenophanes of Kolophon, Empedocles of Akragas (Agrigentum, in Sicily) and Parmenides of Elea (in southern Italy) conveyed their message in hexameters, thus assuming a voice of transcendental and Delphic authority. Parmenides and Empedocles adopted the dactylic hexameter, the verse form of Homer, Hesiod and the Delphic oracles. These thinkers can, following Marcel Detienne, be called ‘masters of truth’ (Detienne 1997).<sup>15</sup> According to Detienne, in ancient Greece, the notion of truth (*aletheia*) underwent a shift when the city-state (*polis*) replaced the feudal authority of the kings in the sixth and fifth centuries. The advent of the *polis* brought about a democratization and “laicisation of truth,” which allowed others beside poets to compete for cultural legitimacy. In other words, these first philosophers were assuming a figure of divine authority and were disputing the authority of other voices such as Homer, Hesiod and the Delphic oracles.

It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive survey of the notion of *aither* in the Pre-Socratics, but I will present some opinions on the subject. In the sixth century we find two conceptions regarding the *aither*. According to one opinion, it stands for the bright fiery air which fills the shining sky and surrounds the world. Empedocles states that the heavens came into being from it (31 B 38 DK). On the other hand, it was widely regarded as the substance of the soul. Both ideas have in common the fiery nature of the *aither*.<sup>16</sup> According

<sup>13</sup> According to some, Pherecydes was the first to write in prose (Apuleius, *Florida* 15 = Fr. 11 Schibli).

<sup>14</sup> According to Themistius, Anaximander “was the first of the Greeks whom we know who ventured to produce a written account on nature” (*Orations* 26.317 Harduin).

<sup>15</sup> Notwithstanding the interest of Detienne’s remarks about the early philosophers’ competition for cultural legitimacy, he argues that *aletheia* has nothing to do with “truth” as the accordance of cognition with the object.

<sup>16</sup> Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1931:138), suggested rendering *aither* as “fire.” This is appropriate for many of the earliest Greek philosophers, but not for all.



to ancient doxographers, the Pre-Socratics argued that the soul has an airy (Anaximenes, Anaximander, Anaxagoras, and Archelaus)<sup>17</sup> and fiery nature (Parmenides, Hippasus, and Heraclitus).<sup>18</sup> A few thinkers argued that the soul was made of warm water (for example Hippo, 38 A 3 DK).

Although in Antiquity, as we have seen, the soul is variously specified as composed of air, fire or water, the common core of all these conceptions is its warm nature (Barnes 1979:170–205). For example, Hippocrates, in his medico-cosmological treatise from the end of the fifth century, explains the ‘hot’ nature of the soul in the following manner (*Fleshes* 2, trans. Kirk-Raven-Schofield):

What we call ‘hot’ seems to me to be immortal and to apprehend all things and to see and hear and know all things, both present and future. This, then, the most of all, when all things become confused, went out to the furthestmost revolution, and seems to me to have been what was called *aither* by the men of old.

According to the doxographer Aëtius (writing perhaps in the later 1st century BCE, but drawing on earlier sources), Anaximenes had declared that “air is the principle (*arche*) of existing things: for from it all things come to be and into it they are again dissolved. As our soul, he says, being air, holds us together and controls us, so does wind (or breath) and air enclose the whole world” (13 B 2 DK). Here again we encounter the idea that the soul is constituted by warm air. Following in his steps, Diogenes of Apollonia suggested that air, as substance of the universe, “may be warmer or cooler, drier or damper... Air occurs in an infinity of states of different scent and colour. The soul of all animals is the same thing, that is, air which is warmer than the air which surrounds us but much cooler than the air which is nearer the sun” (64 B 5 DK). Thus for Diogenes the purity and warmth of the air establishes the differences between beings. Moreover, since everything is permeated with air, each thing in the universe carries within itself a tiny portion of divinity (Freudenthal 1995:81). Here again we encounter the idea that the soul is the divine part within man, and that after death it will return to its abode, the *aither* or fiery and pure air.

<sup>17</sup> See Aëtius, *Placita* 4.3.4 Diels = 18 A 9 DK (Hippasus); Philoponus, *De anima* 9.9 Hayduck = 13 A 23 DK (Anaximenes).

<sup>18</sup> Aëtius, *Placita* 4.3.2 Diels = 13 A 23 DK.

Early on in Greece, there was a connection between immortality and the heavenly bodies. For example, narrations about catasterisms, the transformations of heroes or famous people into constellations, were very popular in Antiquity (*Iliad* 18.483–489; *Odyssey* 5.269–277; Hesiod, *Works and Days* 609–617; Aeschylus, *Phorcides*, *apud* Eratosthenes, *Catasterisms* 22; Aristophanes, *Peace* 832–839; Euripides, *Orestes* 1629–1632; Plato, *Timaeus* 41e; Plautus, *Rudens* 66–71; etc.). These stories are important because they are testimonies regarding the connection between the soul and the *aithereal* regions.

In the fifth century, Alcmeon says that the *psuchê* is similar to the divine bodies. According to Aëtius (24 A 12 DK), for Alcmeon the *psuchê* is supposed “to be a substance self-moved in eternal motion, and for that reason immortal and similar to the divine things.” In a section of the *Phaedrus*, Plato, though he does not name Alcmeon, adapts his argument (245c–246a): “Every *psuchê* is immortal. For what is ever-moving is immortal... Every body whose movement comes from without is inanimate (*apsuchos*) and every body whose movement comes from within is animate (*empsychos*), this being the nature of an animator (*psuchê*). And if this is so, and if what moves itself is nothing other than an animator, then from necessity animators will be both ungenerated and immortal.” Though here Plato is embellishing Alcmeon’s argument, he nevertheless expresses the fact that the soul (*psuchê*), by its animate and self-moved nature, is connected with the heavenly bodies. In Aristophanes’ comedy *Peace* (832–839), the slave of Trygaeos asks if it is true then “what they say, that we become stars in the sky, whenever one of us dies?” Such passages show clearly that in the seventh and sixth centuries, the soul was thought to be transported to the sky after death.

### The Pythagorean Aithereal Earth

Other testimonies for the belief in an aithereal location of the soul in the Archaic and Classical periods are the various passages referring to the Moon as an aithereal Earth, where the soul-*daimon* sojourns. According to Simplicius (c. 490–560), who explicates the Aristotelian account of the Pythagorean system of the world, the Pythagoreans “called the Moon ‘counter-earth,’ as though to call it ‘the aithereal

earth' and because it intercepts the sun's light, which belongs characteristically to the earth."<sup>19</sup> Aëtius also ascribes the counter-earth to "the Pythagoreans" (*Placita* 2.29.4 Diels). These testimonies are quite late, but from the evidence regarding the Pythagorean Philolaus of Croton and his theory of an invisible counter-earth (the *antichthôn*), it seems plausible that the Moon was considered as an aitherial Earth already in the fifth century BCE. According to Demetrius (*apud* Diogenes Laertius 8.85 = 44 A 1 DK), Philolaus was the first Pythagorean to ever publish a book, which had the title *Concerning Nature*. There is no need to postulate, as Walter Burkert did, that this 'counter-earth' situated between the Earth and the central fire should be seen as a myth tied to "the tradition of shamanistic narrative" (Burkert 1972:347), though, as we will see below, other scholars have also maintained that there was in ancient Greece a tradition related to shamanistic techniques (see below, p. 571 ff.). Philolaus' argument was based on astronomical speculations and served to explain various phenomena, such as lunar eclipses (Dicks 1970:67, n.78; Huffman 1993:247).

Because of its intermediary position between the Earth and the heavens, the Moon was seen as the dominion of souls or *daimones*. As Hierocles of Alexandria (c. 408–450) explains, the Moon "stands above corruptible bodies, but comes below heavenly ones, the place the Pythagoreans call the free aither: 'aither' because it is an immaterial and eternal body, 'free' because it is free of material affections" (*Commentary on the Golden Verses of the Pythagoreans* § 27, trans. H. S. Schibli). It was a common belief in antiquity to see the Moon as inhabited by creatures or *daimones*. Philolaus taught that the Moon is "inhabited all around, as the earth is in our zone, by creatures and plants that are larger and more beautiful, for living creatures on the Moon are fifteen times as strong, and eliminate no excrements" (Aëtius, *Placita* 2.30.1 = 44 A 20 DK). Herodotus of Heraclea, who lived in the fifth century BCE, says about the inhabitants of the Moon that "women on the Moon lay eggs, and their offspring are fifteen times as large as we are" (*F.Gr.Hist.* 31 F 21 Jacoby). Anaxagoras also

<sup>19</sup>) Simplicius, in *Cael.* 512.9 ff. = 58 B 37 DK. See also Walter Burkert (1972:232); for a general view, see Franz Cumont (1949:142–188).

believed that the Moon is inhabited (Scholia on Apollonius of Rhodes 1.498 = 59 A 77 DK).

Although some of the details may strike modern readers as fantastic, the underlying logic behind the stories is that these inhabitants are superior to humans because they are situated in a higher, divine realm surrounded by *aither* (Plutarch, *De facie* 943d). For this same reason Hecateus of Abdera, who wrote during the reign of Ptolemy I (367–283 BCE) and who also was a pupil of Aristotle and Pyrrho the Sceptic, depicted the Moon as the Isle of the Hyperboreans (*F.Gr.Hist.* 264 F 7 Jacoby = 73 B 5 DK; also see below). According to a Pythagorean *acousma*, the Sun and the Moon are the Isles of the Blest and the Moon was the abode of the departed (Iamblichus, *Vita Pythagorae* 82 = 58 C 4 DK).

### The Doctrine of Metempsychosis

The doctrine of metempsychosis or the transmigration of the soul is another topic that appears to place the soul in the sky. Even during antiquity, metempsychosis was seen as the Pythagorean doctrine *par excellence*. Aristotle refers to metempsychosis as a “Pythagorean myth” (*De anima* 407b20 = 58 B 39 DK) and his pupil Dicaearchus also refers to it in this manner (14 A 8a DK); he says that Pythagoras’ “most universally celebrated opinions, however, were that soul is immortal; then that it migrates into other sorts of living creature; and in addition that after certain periods what has happened once happens again, and nothing is absolutely new; and that one should consider all animate things as akin. For Pythagoras seems to have been the first to have brought these doctrines into Greece.” Another pupil of Aristotle (as well as of Plato), Heraclides of Pontus, remarks the following about Pythagoras (Fr. 89 Werhli = Diogenes Laertius 8.4–5 = 14 A 8 DK):<sup>20</sup>

Heraclides of Pontus says that [Pythagoras] says about himself that he was once Aithalides, and was deemed a son of Hermes; and that Hermes told him to choose whatever he wanted except immortality, and so he asked that both alive

<sup>20)</sup> All the translations of Pre-Socratic authors that follow are from Barnes 1979, if not stated otherwise.

and dead he should remember what happened. So in his life he remembered everything, and when he died he retained the same memory. Some time later he passed into Euphorbus and was wounded by Menelaus... And when Euphorbus died, his soul passed into Pyrrhus the Delian diver; and again he remembered everything — how he had been first Aithalides, then Euphorbus, then Hermotimus, then Pyrrhus. And when Pyrrhus died, he became Pythagoras, and remembered everything that has been said.

Heraclides, aside from being known for his particular kind of philosophical dialogue which casts ancient characters (see Cicero, *ad Quintum Fratrem* 3.5.1), is most famous for maintaining that the location of Hades is in the sky, and not in the bowels of the Earth (Heraclides of Pontus, Fr. 93–96 Wehrli). This change in the location of the netherworld can be seen also already in the doctrine of the aitherial abode of the soul, common in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. Later, during the Hellenistic period, the idea of a ‘celestial Hades’ will become a common opinion for philosophers and the populace alike.

Regarding the origin of the doctrine of metempsychosis, Herodotus of Halicarnasus, who wrote around 450 BCE, asserts that this doctrine first appeared in Egypt and was introduced in Greece by the Pythagoreans.

The Egyptians were also the first to advance the theory that the soul of man is immortal, and that when the body perishes it enters into (*eisduethai*) another living creature which comes into being at that moment, and when it has gone round all the land animals and all the sea animals and all the birds, it enters again into the body of a man who is coming into being; and this circumambulation goes on for three thousand years. Some of the Greeks adopted this theory — some earlier, some later — as though it were their own; I know their names, but I do not write them down. (2.123 = 14 A 1 DK)

Though Herodotus might be wrong about the Egyptian origin of the doctrine of metempsychosis,<sup>21</sup> we can safely assume that Pythagoras was among the ‘earlier’ Greek thinkers to have maintained this doctrine.

Empedocles also believed in metempsychosis. In his *Katharmoi* or *Purifications*, he says the following: “For already have I once been a

<sup>21</sup>) On Herodotus’ egyptophilia and the Greek fascination with Egypt, see Froidefond 1971.

boy, and a girl, and a bush, and a fish that jumps from the sea as it swims” (31 B 117 DK). In another fragment (31 B 115 DK) he says that,

There is an oracle of necessity, an ancient decree of the gods,  
eternal, sealed with broad oaths:  
whenever one, in his sins, strains his dear limbs with blood,  
... [corrupt text] by misdeed swears falsely,  
[of] the *daimones* [that is] who have won long-lasting life,  
He wanders for thrice ten thousand seasons away from the blessed ones,  
being born throughout the time in all manners of mortal forms,  
changing one toilsome path of life for another.  
For the mighty Air drives him into the Sea,  
and the Sea spews him forth on the dry Earth;  
Earth tosses him into the beams of the blazing Sun,  
and he flings him back to the eddies of Air.  
One takes him from the other, and all reject him.  
Now I too go this route, an exile from the gods and a wanderer. (Inwood  
2001:215–216)

In this fragment, Empedocles tackles the doctrines of metempsychosis, of sin and punishment and of the *aitherial* abode of the gods and of the *daimones*. Empedocles called *daimon* what others such as Plato called *psuchê* (Rohde 1925:381). Banished from the realm of the blessed for a perjury committed, the *daimon* returns on Earth. After long peregrinations — Empedocles says 30,000 seasons, a figure which merely designates an indeterminate long period of time — the *daimones* “appear among mortal men as prophets, song-writers, physicians, and princes; and thence they rise up as gods exalted in honor, sharing the hearth of the other gods and the same table, free from human woes, safe from destiny, and incapable of hurt” (31 B 146–7 DK).

Moreover, Empedocles sees himself (or he describes the manner in which others view him) as healer, seer and purifier (Diogenes Laertius 8.61–2 = 31 A 1 DK), an incarnated *daimon*:

O friends, who dwell in the great city of the yellow Akragas,  
up in the high parts of the city, concerned with good deeds,  
hail! I, in your eyes a deathless god, no longer mortal,  
go among all, honoured, just as I seem:  
wreathed with ribbons and festive garlands.

As soon as I arrive in flourishing cities I am revered  
by all, men and women. And they follow at once,  
in their ten thousands, asking where is the part to gain,  
some in need of divinations, others in all sorts of diseases  
sought to hear a healing oracle.

For this reason he has been called a shaman or having at least a number of key shamanic characteristics (Dodds 1951:145). He was knowledgeable in the defense against evils and old age and, most importantly, he was able to bring from Hades the soul of a man who had died (Diogenes Laertius 8.59 = 31 A 1 DK). For Dodds, “the fragments of Empedocles are the one firsthand source from which we can still form some notion of what a Greek shaman was really like; he is the last belated example of a species which with his death became extinct in the Greek world, though it flourishes elsewhere” (Dodds 1951:145). Today, however, scholars are not so quick in calling Empedocles a shaman (Kahn 1960:30–36).

### Archaic Narrations Concerning the Ascension of the Soul

Greek *Sophoi*, known in scholarly literature as *iatromanteis* (from *iatros*, “healer”, and *mantis*, “seer”)<sup>22</sup> and often described as Greek counterparts to the shamans of various indigenous peoples, are connected with the Hyperborean god Apollo.<sup>23</sup> These healers, sears and purifiers (*kathartai*) were thought to have the ability to temporarily detach their soul from their body through trance or ecstasy.<sup>24</sup> Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 1.21) lists some of these individuals, e.g. Abaris of Hyperborea (c. seventh century BCE), Aristaeas of Proconnesus (c. 650 BCE), Epimenides of Crete (c. 600 BCE), Phormio of Sparta, Polyaratus of Thasos, Pythagoras (c. 532 BCE), Empedocles of Akragas and Empe-

<sup>22</sup>) The first to use the compound word “iatromanteis” instead of “shamans” was Eric R. Dodds (1951:140–146).

<sup>23</sup>) The land of the Hyperboreans was supposedly situated “beyond the North Wind” (Pindar, *Olympian* 3.55). See Bridgman 2005:4.

<sup>24</sup>) On the ambiguity of these terms, see Roberte Hamayon (1995:155–190 and 1998:175–187).

dotimus of Syracuse.<sup>25</sup> To this list Rohde, Diels and Dodds have added Hermotimus of Clazomenai (Rohde 1925:300; Diels 1897:12; Dodds 1951:141–147).

Proclus (412–485), in his commentary on Plato's myth of Er (found in the *Republic* 10.614a–621d), explains in the following manner that it is possible for the soul to depart from and enter into the body. This description, notwithstanding its Neo-Platonic aura, may also explain the mechanism of separation of the soul from the body postulated during the centuries that concern us here.

That the soul can leave the body and return to it is shown by the story about the man of whom Clearchus says that he used his hypnotizing rod (*psuchulkoi rhabdoi*) on a sleeping young man, so that the revered Aristotle, too, became convinced, as Clearchus describes in his work *On Sleep*, that the soul can separate from the body and that it enters the body and uses it as its dwelling-place. For by touching the young man with his rod, he caused the soul to depart and while he led it away from the body by this means, he demonstrated that the body was motionless but remained unharmed, though insensible to blows as if inanimate. But after the rod had brought back the soul, which had meanwhile stayed outside the body, close to the body, it re-entered and could tell everything. (trans. A. P. Bos)<sup>26</sup>

The authenticity of the experience is probable, since we know the interest in the Aristotelian circle for pneumatic experiences.<sup>27</sup> It was fashionable to use boys for such pneumatic experiments since it was believed that their souls were purer and less firmly anchored to their bodies. In Plato's dialogue *Meno* (81a–86b) Socrates also uses a boy's soul for his demonstration of the theory of knowledge as anamnesis or recollection. As for the soul-attracting wand or rod, by means of which one can draw the soul out of the body, Georges Méautis associates it with the staff of Hermes, the guide of souls (Méautis 1929:227–229). We have to remember that Pythagoras was said in one of his previous lives to have been Aethalides the son of Hermes, from whom he received the gift of remembering everything. Like some of the descrip-

<sup>25</sup>) Clement also adds the less likely candidates Zarathustra and Socrates to this list.

<sup>26</sup>) Proclus, In Remp. 2.122.22 = Clearchus, Fr. 7 Wehrli. On this fragment, see Detienne 1963:84; Bremmer 1983:50; Bos 2003:301.

<sup>27</sup>) Clearchus has also written a work on fear (Fr. 36 Wehrli). Pierre Bonnechere (2003:175) accepts the fragment as authentic.



tions of the temporary death of the *iatromanteis*, this presents the appearance of a cataleptic trance (Bolton 1962:139–141, 148–9, 153–6; Culianu 1983:37–39). Moreover, catalepsy was connected with the god Apollo (Culianu 1983:37). Therefore, whether fictional<sup>28</sup> or not, these narrations take us back to the experience of the *iatromanteis*, that we can date to the seventh century BCE (Dowden 1979:298).

The description of Aristeas of Proconnesus' soul journey, though reported by Maximus of Tyre nine centuries after the fact, is a good example of the manner in which these experiences were usually represented (*Discourse* 16.2 Dübner):

As he lay on the ground, scarcely breathing, his soul, abandoning his body, wandered like a bird and saw everything beneath it: earth, sea, rivers, towns, the customs and passions of mankind, and natures of every kind. Then, returning to its body and making it rise, using it once again as an instrument, it told what it had seen and heard.

In another passage, Maximus says that Aristeas' soul, after leaving the body, flew directly towards the *aither* (*Discourse* 38.3 Dübner). According to Herodotus (4.15), Aristeas, who was also known as *phoibolampotos* ("possessed by Apollo"), returned to Proconnesus after six years in order to write the *Arimaspeia*.

Another story concerns Hermotimus. Tertullian reports the following (*On the Soul* 44):

With regard to the case of Hermotimus, they say that he used to be deprived of his soul in his sleep, as if it wandered away from his body like a person on a holiday trip. His wife betrayed the strange peculiarity. His enemies, finding him asleep, burnt his body, as if it were a corpse: when his soul returned too late, it appropriated (I suppose) to itself the guilt of the murder...

Behind this state of catalepsy lies the belief, as Rohde has already noticed, that "the soul in the moment of escape achieves a higher state of being and returns to a form of knowledge independent of sense-perception" (Rohde 1925:52, n.69).<sup>29</sup> As Mircea Eliade remarked,

<sup>28</sup>) Jan Bremmer (1983:50) doubts the authenticity of this fragment.

<sup>29</sup>) As Mircea Eliade (1949:99) explains also, from a history of religions point of view: "leur contact avec les espaces célestes les divinise."

“pouvoir voler, avoir des ailes devient la formule symbolique de la transcendance de la condition humaine; la capacité de s’élever dans l’air indique l’accès aux réalités ultimes” (Eliade 1949:99). We encounter this conception not only in the sixth and fifth centuries and in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* (228, 333 and 360), but also in Plato, Heraclides of Pontus, Aristotle and his pupil Clearchus, Plutarch, and in the Neo-Platonists. The characters of various narratives, such as Strepsiades, Cleonymus, Er the Pamphylian, Empedotimus, the king of Aristotle, Timarchus and Thespesius received their knowledge of divine things by means of the separation of the soul from their body and its journey through the superior or aitherial regions.<sup>30</sup>

In conclusion, though the majority of these stories are quite late (dating from the second and third centuries CE), they nevertheless follow fixed rules of discourse, handing down traditional models. In the same vein, Jan Bremmer (1983:29) has remarked that “the legends of Aristeas and Hermotimus are still remarkably detailed and they can therefore be accepted as memorates from the Archaic Age; the reports are testimonies of the soul belief of that period whether they are considered to be originally Greek or derived from a shamanistic culture.”<sup>31</sup>

## Two Theories of the *Psuchê*

Here we are faced with the need of introducing the reader briefly to the doctrines concerning the nature of the soul. The main question that classicists have posed and which still divides scholars is whether *psuchê* was represented in ancient Greece, from Homer to the Classical Period, as “a mysterious meta-empirical self, independent of consciousness” or primarily as a “complete coalescence of life-soul and consciousness” (Burkert 1972:132–133). Many scholars have tried to

<sup>30</sup> Strepsiades: Aristophanes, *Clouds* 290–364; Cleonymus: Clearchus of Soli, Fr. 7 Wehrli; Er: Plato, *Republic* 613e–621d; Empedotimus, Heraclides of Pontus, *On the Soul*, Frs. 90–107 Wehrli; the king mentioned by Aristotle: Aristotle, *On Philosophy*, Fr. 11 Ross; Timarchus: Plutarch, *De genio Socratis* 589f–592e; Thespesius: Plutarch, *De sera numinis vindicta* 563b–568f.

<sup>31</sup> By “memorate,” Bremmer, following Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, denotes a “report of a supranormal experience either of the narrator himself or of one of his acquaintances” (Bremmer 1983:28).

cover the whole varied, complex and oftentimes contradictory range of concepts relating to the Greek conceptions of the soul under two categories: the soul was represented either as *psuchê* or breath, or as body-soul (*thumos*) and free-soul (*psuchê*). To name just a few scholars, Erwin Rohde, John Burnet, Charles H. Kahn and Jean Bollack (Rohde 1925; Burnet 1916:235–259; Kahn 1960:3–35; Bollack 2003:21–22) have propounded the former thesis, whereas Walter F. Otto, Richard B. Onians, Walter Burkert and Jan Bremmer put forward the latter (Onians 1951; Bremmer 1983). This division is oversimplified,<sup>32</sup> but for our purposes it will do. All these scholars agree, more or less, that after the fifth century, the belief in a unitary soul conception became widespread among Greek philosophers. Friederich Solmsen has stressed the fact that “*soul* as it has been known to the modern centuries and as it still holds some of its ground... has greater affinity with the *psuchê* which came into its own in the late 5th century BCE” (Solmsen 1983:363). To do justice to this issue, we would need more than just the short space allowed here, and will touch only on a particular point or two.

The work of British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor can be seen as a starting point of these theories since many of the scholars discussed here trace their hypotheses to his work. In 1871, Tylor published his book *Primitive Culture*, in which he argued not only that *animism*, i.e. “the belief in spiritual beings,” is the most primitive form of religion, but also that the earliest notion of the soul was of a shadow-soul or ghost-soul or image-soul. This notion was acquired through experiences like dreams, trances and ecstasies. The theory also helps to explain, according to Tylor, the various funeral rites and customs encountered around the world. After Tylor, the various spirits described in different traditions around the world were classified by various scholars (such as Bernard Ankermann and Wilhelm Wundt) into two groups: the body-souls and the free-soul.

According to Rohde (Rohde 1925:377, n. 93), who followed Tylor, the most archaic Greek conception concerning the soul was that of “an independent being dwelling in the body and surviving it,” while the body exercises by its own powers the faculties of perceiving (*phrenes*),

<sup>32</sup> For example, Jan Bremmer (1983) describes the Greek soul belief both as dualistic and multiple.

feeling (*thumos*), willing and thinking (*noos*, in its Attic form *noûs*). Thus, the soul is conceived of as a double or *Doppelgänger*, the belief in a wraith dormant in the living man which leaves the body after death. Aristotle, in one of his lost dialogues, *On Philosophy*, written around 357 BCE (Düring 1976:62), affirmed also that when “the soul is isolated in sleep, it assumes its true nature and foresees and foretells the future” (Fr. 12a Ross). In this passage, Aristotle echoes the view of Pindar, who opined that the soul is inactive in the body during the waking state and becomes active while the body is asleep. These verses are quoted by Plato in *Meno* 81b–c (= Pindar, Fr. 131b Snell/Maehler):

In happy fate all die a death  
that frees from care,  
and yet there still will linger behind  
a living image of life (*aionos eidolon*),  
for this alone has come from the gods.  
It sleeps while the members are active;  
but to those who sleep themselves  
it reveals in myriad visions  
the fateful approach  
of adversities or delights. (trans. Jaeger 1947:75)

This passage by Pindar surely reflects speculations about the soul from the author’s own time, and not Homeric ideas, as Rohde once thought (Rohde 1925:7; cf. West 1971:148 and 183).

According to the modern scholars that propose a dualist or multiple Greek soul belief, first there was a concept of two kinds of souls, and later a conception of one single soul (*psuchê*) came to dominate Greek thought. This theory was expounded by Jan Bremmer, who followed the work of the Swedish Sanskritist, Ernst Arbman, who found that the Vedic concept of soul (*atman*) was preceded by a duality, viz. free-soul and body-souls (Bremmer 1983:9–10). Accordingly, the classicists distinguish between a *free-soul* (*Psycheseele*) representing the individual personality or the *alter ego*<sup>33</sup> (that is, the *psuchê*) and the *body-souls*

<sup>33</sup>) Hans Fischer (1965:243) proposed Traum-Ich or oniric ego instead of alter ego. For further details on these issues, see Ioan P. Culianu (2003:7–8, 32–44 and 60–74).

(*Körperseele*), corresponding to the faculties that Erwin Rohde assigned to the body, and denoted by the term *thumos* (Bremmer 1983:13). This modern theory of the dualistic conception of the soul arose from the need to explain what, according to the Greeks, happens to the soul in the state of ecstasy or during trance. Some scholars<sup>34</sup> have therefore suggested that the Greeks believed that during ecstasy or trance the free-soul or *psuchê*, the individual's nonphysical mode of existence, leaves the body and wanders away.

The Greeks also tried to explain, in their own way, the state of the soul during dreams, swoons, oracles and other altered states of consciousness but, as Ioan P. Culianu remarked, during the sixth and fifth centuries “il n'y a pas une doctrine cohérente de l'âme libre ou du *Traumego*” (Culianu 1984:23).

What the Greek testimonies on the journey of the soul confirm, notwithstanding their reinterpretation by modern scholarship, is that during the two centuries preceding Plato, the *psuchê* was represented as leaving the body and wandering on Earth or in the sky, that is, in the *aither*.

## Conclusion

The Greek sources affirming that the soul sojourns in the *aither* alongside the gods blur the distinction between mortals and immortal gods. Because of its divine nature, and since like is attracted to like, the soul will rejoin its divine home in the *aither*. Many of the Pre-Socratics saw a unity between gods and men. Anaximenes' divine *arche*, which is the source of everything, embraces both men and gods, and Diogenes' God is eternal and immortal warm air, the same stuff the soul is made of. For Heraclitus, the opposition between mortals and immortals is abolished (22 B 62 DK) and thus, all things are one (22 B 50 DK).

According to the standard scenario regarding the evolution of Greek *paideia*, there was a gulf between the beliefs of the Pre-Socratic philosophers and the religion of their contemporaries. The philosophers tried to bridge the abyss which traditional religion had fixed between gods

<sup>34</sup>) Particularly Ernst Arbman and his pupils, Ivar Paulson, Åke Hultkrantz and Karl Jettmar. See Arbman 1963.

and men by transposing it within the visible world itself. Thus, Gregory Vlastos maintains that “they alone, not only among the Greeks, but among all the people of the Mediterranean world, Semitic or Indo-European, dared transpose the name and function of divinity into a realm conceived as a rigorously natural order and, therefore, completely purged of miracle and magic” (Vlastos 1996:23). The earliest Greek philosophy marks thus the beginning of “positivist” thought (Vernant 1983:343–350), which, by means of science and rationality, purges men of “miracle and magic.” In addition, the rise of the city-state helped in the propagation of Pre-Socratic philosophies. The *polis* is therefore seen as a prerequisite for rational thought (Vernant 1983:356–358).

This scenario is simply a continuation of the myth of the ‘Greek miracle,’ which, though unintentionally, distorts the historical record. As we have seen in the introduction, already Homer and Hesiod maintained that there was a certain familiarity between gods and men. Homeric gods are civilized and rational (*Odyssey* 1.32–43) and in the *Theogony* of Hesiod we find a systematization and rational regulation of life. Furthermore, as we have seen in the section about the various archaic narrations concerning the ascension of the soul, traditional and supernatural beliefs were never abandoned.

I am thus not denying the early Greek philosophers’ immense contribution in various fields of knowledge and their continual scrutiny of religious and political conventions, but we cannot remove them completely from the context of their historical period. In order to better understand Archaic and Classical Greek culture, the dichotomist thinking which divides the sixth and fifth centuries from the previous epochs needs to be abandoned. This is a scholarly task that goes well beyond the scope of a single academic paper, but I have tried to show that the belief in the aitherial, and hence divine, sojourn of the soul after the dead of the body bridges, in a certain way, the gap between gods and men as well as between the Archaic and Classical periods.

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## La problématique de Sol Invictus. Le cas de la Dacie Romaine\*

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### Abstract

This study deals with the problem of the difficult attribution of inscriptions dedicated to Sol Invictus, which some authors have interpreted as Mithraic monuments, some as inscriptions belonging to the Syrian god Sol Invictus Elagabal and others, finally, to a Roman Sol Invictus, unconnected with any Eastern influences or Eastern origin. The issue of these multiple epigraphic monuments is of great importance for the study of the diffusion of Mithraism, of the worship of the Syrian deity, and in general for the study of Roman cults of Eastern origin. Departing from theoretical considerations found in the existing literature and through the application of a comparative methodology with monuments from other parts of the Empire, the specific case of Roman Dacia is introduced with a detailed and individual analysis of epigraphic sources associated with the problem, made all the more complicated by the fact that in these inscriptions no explicit mention of Elagabal is made.

### Keywords

Roman religion, sun worship, Sol Invictus, Elagabal, Dacia, epigraphy

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## Introduction

En Dacie, à l'égal que dans tous les autres territoires de l'Empire romain, plusieurs inscriptions portant le nom *Sol*, *Sol Invictus*, *Deus Sol Invictus*, ou simplement *Invictus* ont été trouvées provoquant de forts débats d'interprétation dans l'historiographie spécialisée dès le début du dernier siècle.<sup>1</sup> Ces monuments épigraphiques incluent des dédicaces incertaines à *Sol*, à *Sol Invictus* ou à *Mithras*. Dans quelques uns des monuments, *Sol* accompagne divers dieux, tandis que dans d'autres, le caractère solaire de l'inscription ne peut même pas être assuré étant donné que l'épithète *Invictus* pouvait accompagner — assez fréquemment — d'autres divinités comme, par exemple, le dieu *Hercules*. Même quand on croit se trouver devant une dédicace à *Sol Invictus*, on n'est pas certain qu'il s'agisse de la divinité syrienne *Elagabal* car, jusqu'au présent, aucune inscription où ce dieu soit appelé sous la dénomination spécifique de *Sol Invictus Elagabal* n'a été trouvée en Dacie.<sup>2</sup>

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Alvar Ezquerro; en religion romaine dans la Dacie — et de manière plus spécifique en *Sol Invictus* — comme l'illustre Professeur et Président de la Commission Nationale d'Archéologie de la Roumanie, Mihai Barbulescu ou le Professeur — lui aussi roumain — Sorin Nemeti; ou l'illustre épigraphiste roumain Radu Ardevan, bon connaisseur du problème que je pose et que je cherche à résoudre. En tout cas, je suis le seul responsable de ce qui sera exposé dans les pages qui suivent.

<sup>1</sup> Pour la problématique qui sera traitée, le cadre temporel se centrera sur le développement du culte solaire à Rome durant l'empire et, plus en particulier, à l'époque de la dynastie des Sévères (193–235 après J.C.). Dans le cas de la Dacie romaine — le noyau que cet article prétend analyser — la période analysée serait circonscrite aux années d'existence dudit territoire en tant que provinces romaines (106–270/271 après J.C.).

<sup>2</sup> En ce qui concerne la question traitée, celui-ci constitue en effet le grand problème de la Dacie. Cela ne signifie pas que l'on doive se rendre inévitablement aux thèses maximalistes antérieures — exposées un plus loin — et que l'on ne puisse pas solutionner ce problème par une méthodologie comparative avec des monuments provenant d'autres régions de l'Empire Romaine, cherchant en outre des éléments contribuant à l'attribution des inscriptions — mis à part le nom si générique provoquant lui-même le problème — de sorte que ce qu'on pourrait comprendre comme une « démarche nominaliste » soit surmontée.

On ne peut pas, par ailleurs, nous arrêter en une simple exposition linéaire des différences — en termes de croyances, pratiques, personnes et lieux — existantes entre des cultes de dieux presque homonymes, puisque ce n'est pas l'objectif ni la problématique posée par notre travail. Plusieurs articles et livres ont été écrits à ce sujet et il est indéniable qu'un correct traitement de ces questions serait trop étendu et nous

Sans aucun doute, une grande partie de ces monuments doit être prise en compte lors de l'analyse de la diffusion des cultes romains d'origine orientale en Dacie, mais lesquels? Et à quel culte sont-ils attribuables? Auraient-ils des conséquences sur les études menées à propos de la diffusion du Mithraïsme ou, par contre, sur celles qui portent sur les cultes syriens? Parmi ces monuments, lesquels ne seraient pas en rapport avec l'orientalisme? Et comment ont été interprétées ces inscriptions par les différents spécialistes durant plus d'un siècle?

Une même inscription a pu être attribuée jusqu'à quatre cultes différents pas nécessairement orientaux.<sup>3</sup> L'analyse précise de chaque

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détournerait de la question principale sur laquelle ces différences n'ont pas d'influence significative. Le spécialiste connaît très bien les différences entre, par exemple, le Mithraïsme et le culte romain de *Sol*, ou entre le *Sol indiges* romain et le *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, un *Baal* syrien. Pour ceux qui ne sont pas familiarisés avec ces différences, je leur recommande la bibliographie facilitée à la fin de cette étude bien qu'au long de ces quelques pages certaines de ces différences soient mises en évidence.

<sup>3</sup> Parmi les romains et en ce qui concerne le domaine religieux, le terme "oriental" n'a jamais été appliqué aux peuples ou aux cultures situés sur le continent asiatique ou en Égypte, étant donné que *oriens* aussi bien que *orientalis* apparaissent uniquement lorsqu'il s'agit d'un contexte géopolitique ou bien astronomique (Belayche 2000:567). Tel que Beard, North et Price (1998:246) l'ont si bien exprimé, "several of the cults did certainly proclaim an eastern 'origin' for their wisdom, but it is often clear that a Roman version of the cult differed substantially from its (notional) eastern ancestor. Above all, the 'Orient' itself was hardly the homogeneous category that we (like the Romans, no doubt) often try to make it". La clef semble donc se trouver dans le fait que ces manifestations religieuses autour des divinités originaires d'Orient auraient été répandues dans le monde gréco-romain après avoir été l'objet d'un processus de réinterprétation — ayant peut-être des caractéristiques communes mais différent dans chaque cas particulier — de la même manière que, dans cette conception générale de ce qui était l'Orient à l'époque romaine, leurs origines géographiques et temporels auraient pu être différentes. C'est ainsi que ces manifestations n'étaient orientales que dans une certaine mesure du fait d'avoir expérimenté des changements essentiels au long du processus de diffusion à l'époque hellénistique et, plus tard, sous l'Empire Romain (Alvar 2001:20; 2008).

En ce qui concerne la notion de culte, il est défini comme « une dénomination spécifique, avec des rites propres y compris, dans un système plus vaste correspondant à la religion », de sorte que « lorsqu'on utilise le terme culte on favorise une signification restrictive, face à une réalité plus ample qui serait la religion » (Alvar 2001:22–23). Au même temps, cet auteur considère que « la religion est un système culturel susceptible d'articulation dans des sous-systèmes très variés qui reflètent, dans l'ordre imaginaire, les conditions réelles de l'existence dans une formation historique donnée » (30). Le

épigraphe peut donner des résultats très divers : quelques unes pourraient appartenir à un tel culte, d'autres à un culte différent, etc. Ce que toutes semblent avoir en commun c'est le caractère douteux de leur attribution. C'est ainsi qu'il semble utile de les analyser conjointement au lieu de les inclure total ou partiellement — tel que l'ont fait certains chercheurs — dans les répertoires de monuments des cultes étudiés que ce soit le Mithraïsme, que ce soient les cultes syriens..., tel qu'il sera expliqué plus loin.<sup>4</sup>

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système religieux serait ainsi constitué par trois sous-systèmes : celui des croyances (avec l'ordre cosmologique, l'ordre social et productif et l'ordre scatologique), celui des valeurs et celui des rituels. Il constituerait un système complet capable d'expliquer le fonctionnement du monde et de la propre existence du point de vue de la recherche de son but. Si ce dont on parle ne constitue pas ce système, on ne pourrait pas l'appeler « religion » (23). En tout cas, à propos des problèmes de définition et d'explication, consulter Spiro 1966 ou l'œuvre plus récente de Idinopulos et Wilson 1998. Lorsqu'on parle des manifestations religieuses d'origine orientale, Burkert (2005:10–11) — comme manifestation de la tendance dominante dans la recherche actuelle — soutient que les mystères étaient simplement des cultes et non pas de religions car ils faisaient partie du grand ensemble du paganisme ancien. Par contre, Bianchi (1997:605–611) et Alvar (2001:31–32) considèrent qu'il ne s'agit pas de simples cultes car ils possèdent une pleine potentialité religieuse et fonctionnent comme des réalités autonomes plus ou moins acceptées bien qu'ils puissent agir comme des cultes — ou, en tout cas, comme des sectes — dans le cadre du système culturel plus vaste qui est le système religieux impérial par la piété personnelle et la participation de l'évergétisme sacrificiel public (Gordon 1990:235–255). Mais il semble clair que la plupart des manifestations religieuses d'origine orientale propagées dans le monde gréco-romain ne constituent pas un système religieux tel qu'il vient d'être posé brièvement, de sorte que « la dénomination de cultes semble plus appropriée » (Alvar 2001:23).

<sup>4</sup> L'idée principale de l'article est que — étant donné le nom employé de la déité et d'autres éléments caractéristiques — chaque dédicace ferait partie d'un culte. À partir de ce supposé général, l'évidence avait été classifiée jusqu'à ce moment dans de différents *corpora* épigraphiques. Or, ce qu'on propose de débattre dans cet article ce ne sont pas les caractéristiques des cultes ainsi constitués mais l'attribution de certains monuments épigraphiques à l'un ou à l'autre culte solaire sans disposer d'autres éléments que le nom de la divinité (tenant compte des difficultés de différenciation entre leurs dénominations très similaires) et, à partir de certains critères, proposer une classification individuelle de chaque inscription dont l'attribution à un culte donné ne s'avère pas simple.

Étant donné qu'il s'agit d'une question toujours présente dans le débat historiographique actuel, il faudrait commencer par une étude approfondie de l'état de la question.

En premier lieu il faudrait signaler le chercheur Franz Cumont qui a inclus, dans ses *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*, plusieurs des monuments dont on parle comme étant des expressions du Mithraïsme, y compris les inscriptions dédiées à *Sol Invictus* entre celles dédiées à *Sol Invictus Mithras*, bien qu'il ait identifié aussi d'autres épigraphes au culte syrien d'*Elagabal* (Cumont 1896–1898). Vermaseren fait de même lorsqu'il publie son œuvre «*Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis Mithriacae*». Or, il faudrait remarquer que les deux laissent hors de cette classification quelques monuments qu'ils ne considéraient pas comme étant mithriaques (Vermaseren 1956–1960). Plus récemment, lors de l'analyse du Mithraïsme dans la Dacie romaine, Mariana Pintilie a aussi inclus ces monuments dans sa thèse de doctorat (Pintilie 2003), probablement parce qu'elle a pris comme point de départ de son *corpus* les travaux de Vermaseren et a ajouté les découvertes postérieurement réalisées jusqu'à aujourd'hui. C'est ainsi que les principaux travaux portant sur le Mithraïsme en Dacie ont inclus ces inscriptions dans leur *corpus* comme si elles étaient mithriaques.

Au début des années 1970, Halsberghe introduit une nouvelle approche (Halsberghe 1972, 1984). Bien que son travail ait été fortement critiqué à cause du manque de solidité et de pertinence de l'information, des analyses, des débats et des conclusions qu'il présente (Beaujeu 1978:19), il faut signaler cependant l'important changement qu'il a introduit dans la perspective des monuments dédiés à *Sol Invictus*. En effet, il établit trois critères fondamentaux pour ne pas attribuer les monuments au Mithraïsme: d'une part *Mithras* ne doit pas être explicitement mentionné; d'autre part, il ne peut pas s'agir d'un relief et finalement, le contexte dans lequel le monument a été trouvé ne peut pas être mithriaque, comme par exemple un mithrée. Dans la théorie, cela pourrait sembler simple mais la question résulte très compliquée, surtout lorsqu'il s'agit d'inscriptions fragmentaires. Halsberghe a identifié de nombreux monuments épigraphiques présentant ces caractéristiques, il les a séparés des *corpora* de Cumont ou de Vermaseren et les a attribués au culte syrien de *Sol Invictus Elagabal*.

Turcan et Di Palma se sont centrés sur l'étude du culte de l'époque romaine et sur son essor pendant la dynastie des Sévères (Turcan 1985; Di Palma 1999). Vanderlip et Chirassi Colombo, chacun avec des nuances différentes, ont approfondi le problème de la distinction entre *Sol Invictus* et *Mithras* (Vanderlip 1978; Chirassi Colombo 1979). Aguado García a mené une intéressante étude il y a quelques années, à propos des sources épigraphiques et littéraires du culte à *Sol Invictus* à l'époque de l'empereur Caracalla. Il identifiait ce culte au culte syrien d'*Elagabal* sans aucun problème et, à l'égal que Halsberghe, il remontait la présence de ce culte syrien en Rome jusqu'au milieu du II<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.C. (Aguado García 2001). Cid López a mené lui aussi une étude sur l'importance du rôle joué par les impératrices de la dynastie Sévère dans la diffusion du culte solaire et d'autres cultes syriens (Cid López 1993). En Roumanie, la démarche de Halsberghe a été immédiatement reprise par Sanie qui étudia, vers le milieu des années 1970 et en 1980, les cultes syriens et palmyréniens en Dacie. Ses travaux sur les inscriptions à *Sol Invictus* — en principe non attribuables à *Mithras* et qu'il assigne au culte syrien d'*Elagabal* — ont exercé une forte influence sur toute l'historiographie roumaine postérieure, de telle sorte que le culte à *Sol Invictus* fut dorénavant encadré dans les cultes orientaux de la Dacie romaine (Sanie 1974–1975; 1981). Cette approche marque, par exemple, des travaux assez récents, comme celui de Rusu-Pescaru et Alicu, portant sur les temples en Dacie (Rusu-Pescaru et Alicu 2000), ou celui de Mihai Popescu, portant sur la religion dans l'armée romaine en province (Popescu 2004).

Ainsi donc, l'historiographie roumaine a généralement adopté une des deux options proposées: ou bien elle intègre la plupart des monuments dans le répertoire mithriaque, ou bien elle les inscrit dans le répertoire des cultes syriens les classant comme appartenant au culte syrien de *Sol Invictus Elagabal*. Or, aucune de ces approches n'est correcte. Il est évident que plusieurs de ces monuments ne peuvent pas être simplement attribués au Mithraïsme, étant donné l'existence déjà démontrée d'un culte à *Sol Invictus* dans l'Empire. En outre, le *Sol Invictus* qui apparaît dans certains des monuments ne semble jamais avoir eu un caractère oriental, ce qui serait le cas s'il s'agissait d'*Elagabal*.

C'est vers la fin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle qu'une nouvelle approche surgit, celle de Hijmans. Cet auteur argumentait (Hijmans 1996) que le culte de



*Sol Invictus* avait été créé à partir du culte traditionnel romain de Sol — appelé par certains *Sol Indiges* afin de le distinguer de l'antérieur bien qu'il n'ait pas des témoignages de l'utilisation de ce nom dans l'Antiquité — à cause de l'intérêt des empereurs pour trouver un symbole de gouvernement unique pouvant représenter l'institution de la Principauté. À son avis donc, le culte de *Sol Invictus* n'aurait pas été à l'origine d'un culte syrien — et conséquemment oriental — approche qui avait été adoptée depuis Cumont comme si c'était un dogme, tel qu'il apparaît dans le travail de Halsberghe et dans de nombreux travaux postérieurs. Évidemment, il n'incluait pas les inscriptions explicitement dédiées à *Sol Invictus Elagabal* qui constituaient, indubitablement, des manifestations du culte au dieu syrien, présentes en particulier à l'époque de l'empereur Héliogabale. Le travail de Hijmans reprenait quelques arguments de Seyrig, spécialiste de l'Archéologie de la Syrie romaine qui soutenait que la religion syrienne n'était pas particulièrement solaire et que *Sol* n'avait qu'un rôle subordonné, sauf quand l'origine de la déité était arabe comme c'était le cas d'*Elagabal* à Émèse et d'*Azizos* à Edesse (Seyrig 1971, 1975).

En Roumanie, le travail de Sorin Nemeti sur le syncrétisme religieux dans la Dacie romaine semblerait plus proche des hypothèses de Seyrig et d'Hijmans. Il propose une vision critique de l'historiographie antérieure — presque axiomatique depuis Cumont — autour de l'interprétation de ce *Sol Invictus* comme un culte syrien et oriental par Halsberghe ou Sanie en plus des mentions spécifiques de *Sol Invictus Elagabal* (Nemeti 2005). Puisque Nemeti centre son étude sur le cas de la Dacie, à l'égal que notre étude, il analyse les différents monuments présumés non mithriaques à partir de la constatation indéniable que l'on a déjà signalée: jusqu'à aujourd'hui, aucune inscription dédiée explicitement à *Sol Invictus Elagabal* n'a été encore trouvée dans la Dacie. Il conclut alors que le *Sol Invictus* présent dans le registre épigraphique provincial est, dans la plupart des cas, ce «*Sol* romain» déjà signalé par Hijmans, ou bien le *Sol Indiges*, ne possédant aucun des deux ni un caractère syrien ni oriental en général.

Autrement dit, en termes généraux, cette troisième approche n'accepte l'attribution des monuments épigraphiques au culte de *Sol Invictus* syrien que s'ils font mention à *Elagabal*. Or, on ne peut pas être d'accord non plus avec cette limitation compte tenue des facteurs religieux existant à Rome et dans l'Empire à l'époque de la dynastie des

Sévères et de quelques témoignages procédant de Rome et chronologiquement datables du royaume de Septime Sévère et de Caracalla, comme on le verra par la suite.

On accepte ainsi que quelques monuments ont pu avoir un caractère mithriaque mais naturellement pas tous (en fait, une minorité). À partir de cette hypothèse, on présentera dans les pages qui suivent une interprétation abrégée de l'histoire du culte solaire à Rome jusqu'à l'époque d'Aurélien, bien que cette période ne s'encadre pas dans la chronologie des études sur la Dacie romaine, étant donné que c'est précisément cet empereur qui, en 270 ou 271 après J.C, a ordonné l'abandon administratif et militaire des provinces transdanubiennes de la Dacie.<sup>5</sup>

### Le culte solaire à Rome jusqu'à Aurélien

Le vieux *Sol* romain, dénommé par plusieurs chercheurs *Sol Indiges*, était une divinité adorée à Rome depuis longtemps, ne s'agissant pas d'un dieu d'origine grecque (Nemeti 2005:307; Chirassi Colombo 1979:654). Bien que les témoignages de son culte antérieurs à l'époque impériale ne soient pas nombreux, il est certain que les obélisques du Grand Cirque et du Champs de Mars furent dédiés à *Sol* par Auguste après la conquête de l'Égypte (Chirassi Colombo 1979:654). Le propre Circus Maximus était consacré à *Sol*, car ce dieu était le protecteur des conducteurs de *quadrigae* et il y possédait un temple à l'égal qu'au Quirinal.<sup>6</sup>

Quant au culte de *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, celui-ci procède d'Émèse, ville syrienne où l'on adorait un aérolithe noir appelé « Élagabal » (« dieu de la montagne »), considéré comme l'image sacrée du Soleil Invincible (*Sol Invictus*). Le premier témoignage de l'existence de son culte à Rome serait une inscription remontant à l'an 158 apr. J.C dédiée par *Publius Aelius Amandus* — membre du corps d'élite de la cavalerie impériale

<sup>5</sup> Toutes les sources littéraires de l'abandon de la Dacie appartiennent à Ruscu 1998; 2000; 2003:162–233. Eutrop., 9, 8; Rufius Festus, 8; Iord., *Romana*, 217; SHA, Aurel., 39.

<sup>6</sup> Tert., *De Spect.*, 8: *Circus Solis principaliter consecratur*. Sur les attributs de Sol comme protecteur des quadrigae, consulter Halsberghe 1972:26–28.

(*eques singulares Augusti*) — qui remercie de sa retraite avec tous les honneurs (*honestamissio*).<sup>7</sup> Une autre dédicace épigraphique datant de 184 après J.C, serait un exemple des nombreux témoignages à *Sol Invictus* à l'époque de Commode (*CIL* VI, 740), empereur qui émet des pièces de monnaie avec l'image de *Sol* et qui ajoute *Invictus* à sa titulature impériale, fait désormais fréquent chez les empereurs.<sup>8</sup>

Mais même si ces inscriptions ont été traditionnellement prises comme des témoignages au culte du dieu syrien, le nom d'*Elagabal* n'est jamais mentionné. Il faut signaler dans ce sens que, dans le système de la religion civique de l'époque impériale, il existait une personification de *Sol* qui aurait été le résultat de la fusion entre les vieilles croyances romaines de *Sol Indiges* et les idées grecques sur *Helios*, sa mythologie, son rôle et la manière de le représenter (Nemeti 2005:312). Ce nouveau *Sol* romain — qui prendra le nom de *Sol Invictus* sur de nombreuses inscriptions — constituait un symbole du pouvoir, de pérennité et de victoire associé aux empereurs par l'idéologie impériale. Un *Sol Invictus* dans la structure duquel les influences orientales auraient été, au moins, secondaires ou même inexistantes.<sup>9</sup> Un nouveau culte créé par l'idéologie impériale à partir des cultes plus anciens, un culte qui cherchait un symbole pour représenter les caractéristiques de l'institution de la Principauté: le gouvernement d'une seule personne, avec un caractère victorieux et bénéfique. Ce que le *Sol Invictus* signifiait pour l'univers, l'Empereur le représentait pour l'*oikoumene*, et voilà pourquoi les fréquentes associations (Hijmans 1996:115–116; Gordon 2004).

<sup>7</sup> *CIL* VI, 715: *Soli invicto deo ex voto suscepto accepta missione honesta ex numero equitum singularium Augusti Publius Aelius Amandus donum dedit tertullo et Sacerdote consulibus*.

<sup>8</sup> Il faut préciser cependant que Commode était un fidele adepte de *Mithras* et d'*Hercules*, qui étaient deux autres divinités qui portaient d'habitude cette même épithète.

<sup>9</sup> Nemeti 2005:312. La consécration des obélisques du *Circus Maximus* et du Champ de Mars à *Sol* par Auguste après la conquête de l'Égypte possède un caractère clairement idéologique et de propagande de la victoire plutôt que religieux. Évidemment il est impossible d'affirmer que cette consécration puisse supposer une quelconque influence orientale, dans ce cas égyptienne, dans la structure du culte solaire à Rome. Sur les différentes significations des monuments et des différents objets d'origine égyptienne — du point de vue religieux ou d'autres aspects de la vie de la société romaine — consulter la récente et éclairante étude de Malaise 2007:19–39.

Cependant, l'arrivée de la dynastie des Sévères au trône impérial entraînera des changements. Lorsque Septime Sévère est nommé empereur, la cour va « s'orientaliser » et cette tendance atteint différents domaines du pouvoir impérial, entre autres, la religion. Ceci est le résultat des préférences religieuses, plutôt orientales, de son épouse l'impératrice Julia Domna, fille de Julius Bassianus le grand pontife de *Sol Invictus Elagabal* à la ville syrienne d'Émèse.<sup>10</sup> Nonobstant, à Rome elle a toujours fait preuve d'un respect absolu envers les traditions romaines et a porté un remarquable intérêt pour l'hellénisme et la philosophie.<sup>11</sup> Mais bien qu'on ne détecte pas une promotion personnelle des cultes syriens en Julia Domna — puisqu'elle ne voulait pas s'affronter à l'aristocratie sénatoriale, fidèle aux cultes traditionnels — il existe des témoignages d'une diffusion progressive des cultes syriens et tout spécialement du culte à *Sol Invictus* à Rome et en provinces.<sup>12</sup>

Pourtant, ces manifestations religieuses qui se multiplient à l'époque correspondent-elles au *Sol Invictus* romain ou à *Sol Invictus Elagabal*? Les différents chercheurs ne tombent pas d'accord. Hijmans et Gordon

<sup>10</sup> Turcan 1996:177. Dès la fin du domaine des Séleucides en 64 av. J.C., une dynastie de roi-prêtres d'origine arabe a gouverné Émèse obtenant la citoyenneté romaine dans le I siècle après J.C. par sa loyauté envers le pouvoir romain durant les campagnes de Corbulo, de Vespasien et de Titus en Orient.

<sup>11</sup> Consulter Cid López 1993:251–255 (sur le rôle de Julia Domna et d'autres impératrices syriennes dans la diffusion du culte solaire) et aussi Aguado García 2001:296 et note 7: Pendant les *Ludi Saeculares* du 204 après J.C., la famille impériale a favorisé sa propre légitimation dynastique et a manifesté sa dévotion aux dieux principaux du panthéon gréco-romain, tout en commençant par la primatie du Jupiter capitolin. Précisément, Julia Domna a vénéré personnellement Junon, épouse de Jupiter et reine des cieux, tâche qui correspondait spécialement à l'impératrice. En fait, dans de différentes émissions monétaires, elle est identifiée à cette déesse, ou bien à Vesta, Vénus ou Diane.

<sup>12</sup> Ses préférences religieuses personnelles — qu'elle ne pouvait pas exprimer ouvertement à Rome de peur de l'animosité de l'aristocratie romaine — ont effectivement influé sur la promotion des cultes syriens en général dans tout l'Empire Romain par divers personnages (entre lesquels plusieurs soldats et commerçants syriens) comme des manifestations de loyauté à la famille impériale. Ainsi donc, bien qu'il puisse sembler contradictoire, elle ne promut pas ces cultes personnellement, mais ses préférences religieuses personnelles et celles de sa famille ont été décisives dans les courants religieux de l'époque.

penchent vers la première option, pourvu que le nom d'Élagabal n'apparaisse pas mentionné explicitement dans l'inscription; Nemeti pense de la même manière et il établit une exception avec les inscriptions trouvées là où il y avait des unités auxiliaires formées par des Syriens d'Émèse. En fait, il affirme que le plus correct serait d'identifier les manifestations d'*Élagabal* seulement là où les fidèles sont des Syriens d'Émèse, comme à El-Kantara en Égypte ou à Intercissa en Pannonie.<sup>13</sup> En conséquence, pour eux, toutes les autres inscriptions dédiées exclusivement à *Sol Invictus* à la même époque des Sévères ne constitueraient pas d'expressions du culte à *Élagabal*.

A Rome, sous le royaume de Septime Sévère, une planche en bronze avec le symbole de *Sol quadrigatus* et une inscription présente la dédicace *Inventori lucis Soli Invicto Augusto* (CIL VI, 3721). C'est à dire, on attribue l'invention et la création de la lumière au dieu et on lui ajoute l'épithète *Invictus*, présente à la titulature de Commode et du propre Septime Sévère. Aussi, l'empereur et sa femme sont souvent identifiés à *Sol-Helios* et à *Caelestis* respectivement (Aguado García 2001:297–298). Quant à Caracalla, il a été habituellement identifié à *Sol*, et il apparaît dans la légende de plusieurs pièces de monnaie ainsi que dans la propre iconographie où l'empereur porte une couronne radiée, une lance et le globe de l'*orbis terrarum* (RIC 40–S). Même Cassius Dio raconte que l'empereur se glorifiait de conduire sa *quadriga* (Dio Cass. LXXVIII, 10, 3) comme le faisait le dieu *Sol (Helios)*. De la même manière, Caracalla apparaît lui aussi identifié à *Sol Invictus* sur les inscriptions.<sup>14</sup>

Mais pour l'époque de ces deux empereurs, on pourrait supposer l'existence d'un syncrétisme du *Sol Invictus* romain et du *Sol Invictus* syrien, étant donné qu'il y avait un collège des prêtres de la divinité syrienne à Rome avant le royaume d'Héliogabale (Blázquez 1993:603; Aguado García 2001:301–302). Par exemple, *Titus Iulius Balbius* apparaît dans plusieurs monuments épigraphiques et le fait le plus remarquable est qu'il figure parfois comme *Sacerdos Solis* — comme dans une

<sup>13</sup>) Nemeti 2005:308. Le *numerus Hemesenorum* se trouvait à El-Kantara, tandis que la *cohors militaria Antoniniana* s'était établie à Intercissa, constituée celle-ci par des *hemeseni* dont les *arae* étaient dédiées explicitement à *Sol Invictus Élagabal*, à différence des *arae* de la première cohorte.

<sup>14</sup>) CIL XIII, 6754: *Deo Invicto Soli imperatori caesari Marco Aurelio Antonino...*

inscription du 201 après J.C. (*CIL* VI, 1603) — et parfois, comme *Sacerdos Solis Elagabali* — comme c'est le cas d'une autre inscription datée de la fin du royaume de Septime Sévère ou début de celui de son fils, Caracalla (*CIL* VI, 2269). Un autre membre de cette famille, *Aurelius Iulius Balbillus*, apparaît aussi comme *Sacerdos Solis* dans une autre inscription de l'an 215 après J.C. (*CIL* VI, 2130). En fait, la première inscription qui mentionne ce collège de prêtres *Solis Invicti* date de la fin du II<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.C., ce qui démontrerait la présence du culte à *Sol Invictus Elagabal* à Rome avant le royaume d'Héliogabale, depuis le premier empereur Sévère (Blázquez 1993:603; Aguado García 2001:302), non seulement par des inscriptions avec une mention explicite d'*Elagabal*, mais aussi par d'autres inscriptions où l'épithète *Invictus* n'apparaît même pas. Il est donc possible d'affirmer qu'à Rome il y avait des fidèles du culte syrien à *Sol Invictus Elagabal* dès les dernières années du II<sup>e</sup> siècle et, surtout, dès les premières décennies du III<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.C., et que le culte était organisé avec un collège de prêtres avant le royaume d'Héliogabale, empereur qui convertirait ce culte en officiel. Dans la capitale, le centre de culte se trouverait probablement hors du *pomerium*, étant donné que la plupart des inscriptions ont été trouvées au-delà de cette limite. Pendant cette époque, le culte ne revêtait pas de caractère officiel, mais les premières Sévères se trouvaient entre ses fidèles (Aguado García 2001:301; Halsberghe 1972:40–41; Halsberghe 1984:2183) par tradition familiale plutôt que par dévotion personnelle. En tout cas, *Sol Invictus* était un dieu avec une très forte projection et son culte était le plus répandu de son royaume, ce qui allait de paire avec la dévotion et la loyauté éprouvées par les élites provinciales syriennes et les hauts mandataires de l'Empire à Rome et de la province (Aguado García 2001:302–303) envers la maison impériale. Ceci dit, il pourrait parfaitement s'agir du *Sol Invictus* syrien, c'est à dire, *Elagabal*.

Mais, cela voudrait dire que ce *Sol Invictus* à caractère romain de l'époque des dernières Antonins, aurait-il été remplacé par le syrien sans laisser aucune trace? Absolument pas. Il semble beaucoup plus probable que lorsque Septime Sévère occupa le trône avec son épouse, Julia Domna, il se produisit l'assimilation entre l'identité et le caractère syrien et oriental d'*Elagabal* et, d'autre part, les caractéristiques de ce *Sol Invictus* romain créé par l'idéologie impériale: c'est à dire, un sym-

bole de pouvoir, de pérennité et de victoire associé aux empereurs et par lequel ils essayaient de représenter l'institution de la Principauté. De cette façon, les correspondantes et fréquentes associations de Septime Sévère et Caracalla avec *Sol* n'auraient pas eu seulement ce caractère de dévotion familiale envers le dieu syrien, mais, comme il semble logique et évident, ils auraient voulu aussi tirer profit des caractéristiques idéologiques insufflées au *Sol Invictus* romain présent à Rome et dans l'Empire avant l'arrivée d'*Elagabal* avec la nouvelle dynastie.

Il est bien connu — raison par laquelle on ne s'étendra pas trop à ce sujet — qu'après la mort de Caracalla et de l'usurpateur Macrinus, Julia Maésa, sœur de la déjà décédée Julia Domna, a fait en sorte que son petit-fils, Varius Avitus Bassianus, fils de Julia Soemias, obtienne le trône. Encore adolescent, Bassianus était le *Sacerdos Amplissimus* de *Sol Invictus Elagabal* à Émèse. Il accepta d'être empereur pourvu qu'il maintienne sa dignité sacerdotale (Hdn., V, 3, 2; 3, 6; 3, 8; V, 5, 3–4; V, 5, 8–6, 1) et emporta à Rome le bétyle, la pierre sacrée du dieu, sur une *quadriga* processionnelle, à la manière du chariot de *Sol*, en un voyage qui prit une année (Turcan 1996:178). À Rome, Bassianus commença à être connu comme Héliogabale à cause de sa dévotion exclusive et excluante au dieu, car il aspirait à que *Sol Invictus* fût situé par dessus le même Jupiter capitolin, le garant traditionnel de la souveraineté et de la victoire romaines (Turcan 1996:179). Il officialisa son culte, commanda la construction d'un temple dédié à *Elagabal* au Palatin (Hdn., V, 5 8–9; V, 6.6) et y réunit des symboles d'autres dieux, tels que le bétyle de Cybèle, le feu de Vesta, le *Palladium* et les *ancilia* ou boucliers sacrés, qui étaient les anciens protecteurs du pouvoir romain. Il développa également la théogamie premièrement par son mariage avec Julia Cornelia Paula, qu'il transforma en une union divine entre *Sol Invictus Elagabal* et Vesta. Son deuxième mariage, avec Annia Aurelia Faustina, devient le mariage sacré de *Sol Invictus Elagabal* et *Iuno Caelestis* (Hdn., V, 6, 1–2; V, 6, 3–5). Il se peut que ses actes mettent en évidence l'intérêt porté à l'union entre des cultes d'origine différente : orientaux, romains et africains ; ce qui rappellerait, même partiellement, la politique religieuse de premières Sévères (Cid López 1993:259–60). Bien qu'on ait pu interpréter qu'*Élagabal* voulait imposer une réforme religieuse dans laquelle *Sol Invictus Elagabal* serait à la base d'un système monothéiste héliaque, ces gestes correspondraient plutôt à ce que Nemeti a dénommé « hén-

théisme solarisant » (Nemeti 2005:308; voir aussi Turcan 1985:25–37 et 149–57; Halsberghe 1972:45–127; Halsberghe 1984:2184–95), c'est à dire l'exaltation et le privilège de son dieux par dessus tous les autres. Il ne s'agit pas d'une tentative d'imposition officielle d'un dieu solaire comme le dieu suprême de l'Empire, tel que Aurélien le fera plus tard, mais de mettre l'accent sur le caractère différent, unificateur, cohésif et intégrateur de l'Empire, en un temps et dans des circonstances très difficiles (Halsberghe 1984:2196–2198). Avec Héliogabale, le culte syrien de *Sol Invictus Elagabal* atteint son point culminant, fondé sur le syncrétisme du *Sol Invictus* romain établi et utilisé par Septime Sévère et Caracalla (Aguado García 2001:296).

Le zèle religieux excessif de l'empereur suscita le mécontentement de l'aristocratie sénatoriale romaine. Ses gestes heurtaient les anciennes coutumes, l'ordre romain et les bases du système de la religion civique — support idéologique du système — de sorte que sa grand-mère, Julia Maësa, ordonna son assassinat ainsi que celui de sa mère, Julia Soemias, en 222 apr. J.C. afin d'introniser son autre petit-fils, Alexianus fils de Julia Mamaea, qui régna comme Sévère Alexandre. Une des premières actions entreprises par celui-ci fut la restitution du bétyle à Émèse et le redressement de la prétendue réforme religieuse commencée par son cousin, mais celle-ci ne fut pas accompagnée de l'interdiction de la pratique du culte. L'organisation sacerdotale et les temples furent épargnés et la politique religieuse commencée par les premiers Sévères empêcha la disparition du culte à *Sol Invictus* en Italie et en province (Halsberghe 1972:121).

Quelques décennies plus tard, vers 274 apr. J.C., Aurélien officialisa le culte d'un *Sol Invictus* — très différent du culte syrien d'Élagabal — qui recueille plutôt le caractère idéologique du *Sol Invictus* romain comme symbole de pouvoir, de pérennité et de victoire. Le culte, devenu officiel, prétend alors transmettre ces caractéristiques qui symbolisent l'unité de tout l'Empire romain (Turcan 1996:183). Cependant, tel qu'il a été déjà signalé, la réforme religieuse d'Aurélien ne sera plus analysée dans cet article puisqu'elle reste hors de la chronologie des études portant sur la Dacie romaine du fait d'avoir été abandonnée administrativement et militairement en 271 après J.C.



## L'analyse des monuments épigraphiques de la Dacie

Une fois l'état de la question exposé et après cette brève introduction sur le culte solaire à Rome pendant le II<sup>e</sup> et le III<sup>e</sup> siècles apr. J.C. — nécessaires pour une meilleure compréhension du problème dans les provinces en dépit du fait qu'ils n'apportent pas de données nouvelles —, il est important de se centrer sur l'analyse des monuments épigraphiques dont l'attribution est problématique et qui ont été trouvés dans les trois provinces de la Dacie romaine: la province Malvensis (la plus méridionale), l'Apulensis (la centrale, correspondante à la Transylvanie et le Banat) et la Porolissensis (la région la plus septentrionale) (Ardevan et Zerbini 2007).

Mais il est nécessaire de formuler avant, de manière explicite, des critères pour notre proposition de nouvelle classification :

- 1) Un critère déjà connu est que si le monument en question n'a pas été découvert dans un *mithraeum* et que s'il ne comporte pas de reliefs ou des symboles proches du Mithraïsme, il devrait être attribué au culte de *Sol Invictus* et non pas à celui de *Mithras*, bien qu'à faute d'autres éléments il soit difficile de savoir s'il s'agit de la divinité romaine ou d'*Elagabal*.
- 2) La présence de restes d'éléments sculpturaux non identifiés à côté de l'inscription permettrait leur attribution à *Mithras*, *Sol* ou *Hercules* mais certainement pas à *Elagabal*.
- 3) L'association à des divinités gréco-romaines comme les *dii consentes* dans la même inscription serait un facteur de poids en faveur de l'attribution au *Sol Invictus* romain.
- 4) L'identification dans l'inscription entre *Sol* et une autre divinité non gréco-romaine différente de celles étudiées dans ce travail (par exemple, *Serapis*, *Bussurigi*, *Iarhibol* ou *Malachbel*) soulignerait simplement le caractère solaire de cette deuxième divinité par une assimilation générique à *Sol* qui, dans ce cas, ne serait ni l'*Elagabal* syrien ni, évidemment, *Mithras*.
- 5) Il a été déjà signalé qu'à l'époque de la dynastie de Sévère, des inscriptions dédiées à *Sol Invictus Elagabal* existent à Rome sans mentionner de manière explicite la divinité syrienne. Dans ce sens, et par les raisons exposées dans la première partie de cette étude, une

datation de l'époque des Sévères pourrait constituer un indice en faveur de l'attribution à *Elagabal*.

- 6) Les témoignages de loyauté politique et religieuse envers les empereurs et leur idéologie dominante indiqueraient une attribution au *Sol Invictus* romain ou au *Sol Invictus* syrien à l'époque des Sévères.
- 7) Des épithètes spécifiques, comme *Augustus*, indiqueraient un caractère plus idéologique proche d'une manifestation du culte impérial, ce qui expliquerait très probablement une attribution au *Sol Invictus* romain.
- 8) La condition sociale humble (esclaves ou affranchis) ou la condition militaire des dédicants corroborerait l'attribution au culte mithriaque.
- 9) Également, l'origine orientale des dédicants corroborerait surtout l'attribution au culte mithriaque ou à celui de *Sol Invictus Elagabal*. Si l'onomastique du dédicant était clairement syrienne, l'option d'*Elagabal* serait beaucoup plus probable.
- 10) Évidemment, l'existence d'analogies précises dans la Dacie ou dans d'autres provinces de l'Empire serait utile pour appuyer des hypothèses dans certains cas.
- 11) Une présence significative de monuments d'un des cultes mentionnés dans le lieu ou dans la localité où l'inscription a été découverte, par rapport à d'autres sites, corroborerait l'attribution à ce culte en particulier.

Il est évident que, dans certains cas, un critère donné ne sera significatif qu'en conjonction avec d'autres ou que la considération d'un critère pourra annuler l'importance d'un autre. Étant parfaitement conscients des difficultés et des limitations que notre travail présente, l'objectif ne sera pas tant de réussir la classification d'une inscription comme une manifestation d'un culte ou d'un autre mais de questionner les classifications préalables réalisées sans tenir compte des critères ici formulés.

Et maintenant, sans aucun autre préambule, chaque inscription problématique de la Dacie romaine sera commenté.

En Dacie *Malvensis*, un seul monument épigraphique concernant cette étude provient de *Sucidava*, petit village de *Celei* actuellement intégré à la ville de *Corabia* (Répertoire 22). Il s'agit d'une base de statue fragmentaire avec une inscription. Malheureusement, la statue ne

conserve que le pied gauche et il manque la partie gauche du champ épigraphique de l'inscription. La pièce est donc difficilement attribuable à *Mithras*, à *Sol* ou encore à *Hercules*. Tudor et Petolescu postulaient, au début, l'inclusion de la pièce parmi les monuments mithriaques car, à leur avis, le pied appartenait à une statue de *Mithras* et Pintilie l'incluait, elle aussi, dans son répertoire de monuments mithriaques en Dacie (Tudor 1966:600, n° 18; *IDR* II, 202; Pintilie 2003:187, n° 52). Néanmoins, plus tard, Petolescu soutient que le pied nu de la divinité correspondrait plus probablement à une statue d'*Hercules* qu'à une de *Mithras* (Petolescu 2005:79, n° 106). Or il pourrait bien s'agir aussi d'une sculpture de *Sol*, comme c'est le cas d'une autre statuette en bronze provenant d'Apulum (Rép. 10) — ville qui donne son nom à la Dacie Apulensis — ou d'une autre pièce très similaire à celle de Sucidava, provenant également d'Apulum (Rép. 11). Il est aussi probable que la petite statue représente *Sol* avec des traits de la divinité gréco-romaine, comme une expression plastique du dieu romain *Sol Invictus* employé comme modèle sculptural. En tout cas, l'attribution de l'inscription au culte de *Sol Invictus* — romain et non pas syrien — au Mithraïsme ou au culte d'*Hercules* résulte douteuse. Aussi, il faut souligner que — jusqu'au présent — trois reliefs anépigraphiques et deux reliefs avec des inscriptions appartenant au mithraïsme ont été trouvés à Sucidava.<sup>15</sup> Le fait que les dédicants, Marianus et Iulianus aient pu être, très probablement, des esclaves d'origine orientale, encouragerait cette possibilité, bien qu'il soit difficile de se prononcer strictement sur leur origine et statut social.

En ce qui concerne la Dacie Apulensis, un autel dédié à *Deus Sol Ierhabol* par Aurelius Laecanius Paulinus — ancien garde d'armes de la *cohors I Vindelicorum* et par la suite décurion de la colonie Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (Rép. 23) — a été trouvé à Tibiscum. Il est daté entre 211 et 212 apr. J.C. — pendant le règne conjoint de Caracalla et Geta et la mention de *Sol* et d'*Ierhabol* remarquerait son caractère solaire. L'identification de ces deux divinités pourrait s'expliquer par le processus de métamorphose souffert par le dieu palmyrénien *Ierhabol* à l'époque impériale romaine, avec le développement et l'essor de la théologie solaire (Russu 1969:184). Néanmoins, dans ce cas-ci il ne faudrait pas

<sup>15</sup> *CIMRM* II, n° 2182; Tătuilea 1998. Pour les deux reliefs avec des inscriptions, *ILLD* 80 n° 110 et 111.

parler du *Sol Invictus* syrien ni de *Mithras* non plus, mais il faudrait accentuer seulement le caractère solaire d'*Ierhabol* par une assimilation générique au dieu *Sol*.

Un cas similaire est celui de l'autel dédié à *Deus Sol Ierhabol* en Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa érigé par un tribun romain très vraisemblablement à la même époque (Rép. 26). La même volonté de signaler le caractère solaire du dieu palmyrénien y serait présente.

Le cas de *Deus Sol Malagbel* qui apparaît dans une autre inscription dans la même ville (Rép. 27) est aussi analogue. La mention de *Sol* devant le nom de la divinité palmyrénienne souligne son caractère solaire.

Pourtant, en Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa deux inscriptions très différentes ont été trouvées. La première est dédiée à *Sol Invictus* par *Lucius Domitius Primanus* (Rép. 25). Il n'a pas été possible de dater le monument, et la classe sociale et le métier de Primanus restent inconnus; cependant, le nom du dédicant et la structure en *tria nomina* du nom feraient penser à une origine romaine ou italique (Sanie 1981:131). Étant donné les caractéristiques du monument, il s'agirait d'une dédicace à *Sol Invictus* plutôt qu'à *Mithras*, mais à cause du manque d'un plus grand nombre de données, il est difficile de savoir si cette mention fait référence à ce dieu *Sol Invictus* romain ou à l'*Elagabal* syrien.

L'autre inscription offre plus de données à commenter. Elle a été dédiée entre les années 247 et 249 apr. J.C. par Publius Aelius Hammonius, un *equites*, *vir egregius* et procureur de la Dacie Apulensis qui avait été commandant de plusieurs unités auxiliaires en Asie et en Europe entre 232 et 244 apr. J.C.<sup>16</sup> Son *cognomen*, Hammonius, provient du nom du dieu égyptien Ammon, assez fréquent dans l'onomastique des grecs de l'Égypte quelques siècles avant la conquête romaine de la Dacie. Dans ce cas, elle indique clairement une origine gréco orientale. Dans la dédicace, le dieu *Sol Invictus* apparaît à côté de nombreuses divinités gréco-romaines: *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus*, *Iuno*, *Minerva* et d'autres *dii consentes*; mais aussi à côté de *Salus*, *Fortuna Redux*, *Apollo*, *Diana Victrix*, *Nemesis*, *Mercurius*, *Hercules*, *Aesculapius*, *Hygia* et les dieux et déesses immortels. Tel que Nemeti a bien signalé, dans ce contexte, il

<sup>16</sup> Rép 24. Sur ce personnage, voir Piso 1976.

résulte difficile de supposer que ce dieu solaire ait le caractère syrien d'*Elagabal* (Nemeti 2005:312).

Un autre monument équivoque provient de Micia (aujourd'hui Vetel, petit village appartenant à la commune de Deva), où l'affranchi grec ou gréco oriental *Publius Aelius Euphorus* dédia une inscription et construisit un temple à *Deus Invictus* (Rép. 18). Sa condition économique devait être assez prospère parce qu'il a pu financer la construction du temple. Il pourrait s'agir d'une inscription dédiée à *Mithras* et, par conséquent, d'un *mithraeum*, option choisie par Pintilie (Pintilie 2003:177, n° 10). Mais, tel que Piso suggérait — bien que par rapport à un autre sanctuaire d'Apulum — si ce temple appartenait vraiment à *Mithras*, une inscription avec le nom du dieu ne pourrait jamais y être absente (*IDR* III/5, 354). Il s'agirait alors plus vraisemblablement d'un temple dédié à *Sol Invictus*. Mais lequel? Rusu-Pescaru et Alicu suggèrent que puisque tous les temples consacrés aux divinités orientales étaient habituellement regroupés, celui-ci aurait pu se trouver au sud-ouest du campement militaire près du temple de *Jupiter Hierapolitanus* mais ce raisonnement établit comme axiome l'interprétation de *Sol Invictus* comme l'*Elagabal* syrien (Rusu-Pescaru et Alicu 2000:139), ce qui est difficile de prouver — au moins dans ce cas — car il n'y a aucune datation de l'époque des Sévères pouvant soutenir ladite interprétation. C'est ainsi, à cause de cette absence de datation et de la mention explicite d'*Elagabal*, qu'il faudrait penser plutôt au *Sol Invictus* romain.

Vers l'intérieur du bassin carpatique, à Germisara, une autre inscription a été dédiée à *Sol Invictus* par Aelius Iulius (Rép. 17). Celui-ci porte un nom avec des résonances romaines, mais il n'a que *dua nomina* et prend le gentilé Iulius comme *cognomen*, de telle sorte qu'il a été éventuellement considéré un Oriental (Sanie 1981:132). On connaît un *Aelius Iulius*, appartenant à la légion *XIII Gemina*, à partir d'une inscription gravée sur une pièce en céramique scellée d'Apulum (*CIL* III, 8065), bien qu'il soit difficile de préciser s'il s'agit du même personnage. Aussi, Russu signale la présence d'un Aelius Iulius, un centurion vétérane, à Ciumăfaia, une ville près de Cluj-Napoca (*IDR* III/3, 221). Aussi bien Russu que Pintilie incluent cette inscription parmi les dédicaces à *Sol Invictus*. Cependant, il n'y a plus de données nous permettant de dater le monument et d'argumenter que ce *Sol Invictus* puisse être l'*Elagabal* syrien.

Ainsi arrive-t-on à Apulum (actuellement Alba Iulia), où deux noyaux urbains ont réellement existé (Pintilie 2003:188, n° 54). Si l'on considère ces deux villes à Apulum comme un ensemble, on obtient un total de 14 monuments épigraphiques et statuariers ainsi qu'un temple, présentant tous les problèmes d'attribution dont on parlait au début de cette étude.

Trois des cas résultent, peut-être, plus faciles à solutionner. Le premier c'est une nouvelle dédicace à *Deus Sol Iarhibol*, réalisée par Aurelius Bassinus, prêtre du dieu et décurion de la colonie d'Aequum, en Dalmatie, dans les premières décennies du troisième siècle après J.C. (Ardevan 1998:45–50). À l'égal que dans les exemples déjà proposés de Tibiscum et d'Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa concernant cette divinité palmyrénienne, la mention de *Sol* souligne son caractère solaire mais n'indique pas la présence de *Sol Invictus Elagabal*. C'est le même cas que celui d'une autre inscription dédiée à *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Sol Bussurigi* par *Publius December Aelius*, d'une probable origine galate, à la fin du II<sup>e</sup> siècle ou début du III<sup>e</sup> siècle apr. J.C. (Rép. 13). Quelques auteurs, tels que Popa, Berciu ou Husar ont voulu voir la présence de *Sol* comme un témoignage de l'existence d'une relation avec le culte mithriaque (Popa et Berciu 1974:316, n° 1; Husar 1999:260), mais — tel que Piso signale — il s'agit surtout d'une contamination avec *Sol*, bien qu'il pense — erronément à notre avis — que celui-ci serait le *Sol Invictus Elagabal* syrien (*IDR* III/5, 207). En tout cas, il s'agit d'un clair exemplaire des tendances syncrétistes religieuses dominantes à l'époque, où la divinité locale galate se joigne au dieu suprême du panthéon gréco-romain et, à la même fois, à *Sol*, comme une expression de l'essor du culte solaire.

Le troisième exemple mentionné est celui d'un autel dédié par un sénateur italique — gouverneur propréteur des trois provinces de la Dacie vers 173–175 apr. J.C. — pendant le gouvernement de Marc Aurèle (Rép. 14). La dédicace est dirigée à Sérapis-Jupiter-Sol et à Isis-Diane-Lune. Le caractère de divinité suprême développé par Sérapis, ainsi que ses attributs solaires hérités d'Apis, fils de Rê, sont assez connus. De toute façon, la solarisation est aussi secondaire dans ce cas, où les dieux adorés sont essentiellement Sérapis et Isis.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Takács 1995:199–200. Il interprète que le dédicant prend les noms de Jupiter et de

D'autres monuments trouvés à Apulum résultent plus problématiques encore. Tel est le cas d'une inscription dédiée à l'*Invictus Deus* par quelqu'un dont le nom n'arrive pas à nos jours et dont l'époque est imprécise (Rép. 2). Radu et Vermaseren les incluaient dans les monuments mithriaques (Radu 1961:103, n° 10; *CIMRM* II, n° 1961), mais Sanie les en exclue et les range parmi ceux du culte syrien de *Sol Invictus* (Sanie 1981:267, n° 64). Toutefois, il n'y a aucune donnée qui permette de l'identifier clairement à une manifestation mithriaque (une mention formelle, un relief culturel ou symbole proche, une trouvaille dans un mithraeum, etc.), ni au culte de *Sol Invictus* non plus, que celle-ci soit la dénomination de la divinité syrienne *Sol Invictus Elagabal* ou du *Sol Invictus* romain. Par ailleurs, d'autres dieux comme *Hercules* portaient aussi assez habituellement l'épithète *Invictus*, de sorte que l'attribution certaine à l'un ou à l'autre culte résulte extrêmement compliquée, voire impossible. Cependant, par analogie avec d'autres cas provenant d'autres provinces de l'Empire, la formule imprécise et simple d'*Invicto Deo* pourrait suggérer une référence à *Mithras*.

C'est le même cas d'une autre inscription découverte plus récemment, qui utilise la même formule pour parler de cette divinité (Rép. 12). Elle est dédiée par Spatalus, un esclave intendant de la maison de son seigneur, Caius Iulius Rufinus, et présente un nom grec latinisé (*Σπαταλος*). Le monument — qui n'a pas pu être daté — est attribué par Piso et Băluță à *Mithras* car à ses alentours, au fond aussi du fleuve, une autre inscription témoignant d'un temple de cette divinité (Piso et Băluță 2001:190–191, n° 1; *IDR* III/5, 709) a été trouvée. Or, dans cette même région, d'autres monuments dédiés à différentes divinités ainsi que des sarcophages et des simples blocs en pierre calcaire sont apparus, dans les mêmes conditions. Comme Piso souligne, dans le côté Est de la ville, un grand nombre de monuments réutilisés dans la muraille a été jeté à la fosse. Cet auteur signale aussi que la muraille située au Sud de la ville, juste en parallèle au fleuve Mures, n'a pas été identifiée encore et que le lit du fleuve a changé plusieurs fois (*IDR* III/5, 720). L'existence d'une inscription dédiée à *Mithras* dans les environs, témoignant de l'existence d'un temple consacré à cette divinité,

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Sol, de Diane et de Lune, comme d'autres dénominations sous lesquelles Sérapis et Isis sont également connus, selon le principe de polynomie.

n'est pas un argument concluant compte tenue de la réutilisation et le transport des pièces dont on a déjà parlé et de l'existence probable d'un temple dédié à *Sol Invictus* à Apulum, comme on verra par la suite. Mais il est vrai que, à l'égal que pour l'inscription antérieure, la formule imprécise d'*Invicto Deo* suggère plutôt une référence à *Mithras* par analogie avec les cas venants d'autres provinces de l'Empire.

De nouveau un problème d'identification surgit avec l'inscription dédiée par Caius Iulius Valens (Rép. 9), un *haruspex* probablement romain ou italique de la colonie d'Apulum et prêtre (*antistes*) d'un sanctuaire où, apparemment, des différentes divinités gréco-romaines étaient adorées (*Nemesis Regina*, *Venus Victrix* ou *Virtus Romana*), tel qu'il en découle d'autres inscriptions du même dédicant, datables à partir du royaume de Commode. Il s'agit d'un témoignage intéressant de la diffusion religieuse à Apulum (*IDR* III/5, 297, 364, 367, peut-être 388 et peut-être aussi Rép. 11). Le fait que les autres dieux adorés par le dédicant soient gréco-romains ne devrait rien signifier, mais qu'ils se trouvent tous dans le même temple pourrait nous indiquer l'attribution de cette inscription à *Hercules* ou au *Sol Invictus* romain. Ainsi, il faut souligner de nouveau le caractère très douteux (même peu probable ou tout à fait improbable) de cette inscription quant à son attribution éventuelle au culte de *Sol Invictus Elagabal* ou à celui de *Mithras*.

Une statuette en bronze représentant *Sol* avec les traits de la divinité gréco-romaine semble remonter à la fin du II<sup>e</sup> siècle ou début du III<sup>e</sup> apr. J.C. Elle inclut dans sa base le nom de son dédicant *Marcus Aurelius Sila, actarius* du corps de garde montée du gouverneur provincial, qui semble romain ou italique (Rép. 10). L'époque donnée par la datation du monument, avec un développement clair et progressif de la théologie solaire orientale, fait penser qu'il pourrait s'agir plutôt d'une expression plastique du *Sol* romain et pas de l'*Elagabal* syrien, pour laquelle le modèle sculptural de la divinité gréco-romaine est utilisé.

Plus difficiles encore sont la datation et l'attribution d'un fragment d'une statuette avec une inscription dans sa base, qui pourrait être reconstituée de plusieurs manières différentes et, conséquemment, donner lieu à des interprétations variées (Rép. 11). À partir des restes de la sculpture, Sanie argumentait qu'il s'agissait d'une représentation de *Mithras*, mais comme il n'en reste qu'un pied, l'argument ne semble pas suffisamment solide (Sanie 1974–1975:332). En ce qui concerne



Piso, il soutient que la statuette pourrait aussi appartenir à un *Hercules*, puisque cette divinité est bien représentée dans le registre de sculptures et parce qu'elle porte assez fréquemment l'épithète *Invictus* (*IDR* III/5, 357). Mais il pourrait également s'agir d'une sculpture de *Sol* dédiée au *Sol* romain comme la statuette antérieure ou comme celle correspondant au fragment avec inscription trouvé à Sucidava (Rép. 22). Encore une fois, l'attribution du monument en question à l'un ou à l'autre culte est douteuse mais, en tout cas, il semble évident qu'il ne peut pas s'agir du *Sol Invictus* syrien. Ce sont tous ces cas d'attribution douteuse ou difficile qui rendent nécessaire leur analyse conjointe indépendamment des différents *corpora* monumentaux.

Six autres monuments épigraphiques d'Apulum mentionnent *Sol* mais sans nommer *Mithras*; tous ont été inclus cependant dans le répertoire des monuments mithriaques par Vermaseren. Le plus ancien, daté entre 183 et 185 apr. J.C. pendant le règne de Commode, serait celui dédié à *Sol Invictus* par le sénateur italique et légat de la légion *XIII Gemina*, Caius Caerellius Sabinus (Rép. 8). Cette inscription est un témoignage de l'existence d'un temple consacré à *Sol Invictus* dans les *canabae* voisines du campement légionnaire à Apulum. Encore une fois, la détermination de la divinité — soit *Sol Invictus* soit *Mithras* — à laquelle l'inscription fait référence est problématique. Halsberghe, Sanie et Rusu-Pescaru et Alicu préfèrent la première option et l'identifient avec *Elagabal* (Halsberghe 1972:115; Sanie 1981:133; Rusu-Pescaru et Alicu 2000:139), tandis que Bărbulescu soutient le contraire (Bărbulescu 1984:150–151). Pourtant, comme Piso signalait bien, au cas où la construction aurait été vraiment mithriaque, le nom du dieu n'aurait jamais manqué d'une inscription mentionnant la restauration du sanctuaire (*IDR* III/5, 354). Il s'agirait donc d'une inscription et d'un sanctuaire (*aedes*) de *Sol Invictus*, mais de la divinité romaine, pas syrienne, compte tenu de l'époque de construction du monument et des préférences religieuses du dédicant, en particulier envers la triade capitoline (*IDR* III/5, 107, 139 et 260; Nemeti 2005:312).

Un autre monument épigraphique similaire dédié par un autre sénateur dirigeant la même légion mais à une époque postérieure mal définie, était aussi érigé au *Sol Invictus* (Rép. 7). Le dédicant, *Quintus Caecilius Laetus*, était un sénateur originaire de Cirta en Afrique et légat de la légion *XIII Gemina* entre 185–188 ou 193–197, ou peut-être au

III<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.C., d'après Piso. Il est aussi connu par deux autres inscriptions à Apulum et une autre à Milev (*IDR* III/5, 77, 82, et *CIL* VIII, 8207; Piso 1993:248–250). Encore une fois, il pourrait s'agir d'une dédicace à *Sol Invictus* (peut-être même à *Sol Invictus Elagabal*) plutôt qu'à *Mithras*. En effet, l'origine africaine du dédicant et sa haute position sociale font penser que cette inscription est, fort probablement, une preuve de loyauté impériale à travers la dédicace au culte de la divinité de la ville de l'épouse de l'empereur, pourvu qu'on accepte sa datation à l'époque de la dynastie des Sévères. Par contre, si on acceptait que l'inscription date de la fin du II<sup>e</sup> siècle mais avant la période des Sévères, il serait préférable de l'attribuer à *Sol Invictus* qu'à *Mithras*, mais alors il s'agirait de la divinité romaine plutôt que du dieu syrien.

Un troisième sénateur et légat légionnaire, *Quintus Marcius Victor Felix Maximillianus*, accompagné de son épouse, *clarissima Pullaiena Caeliana*, et de son fils, *clarissimo Publius Marcius Victor Maximillianus*, dédia une inscription à *Sol* (Rép. 3). Halsberghe et Sanie soutiennent qu'il s'agit d'une dédicace au *Sol Invictus* syrien et pas à *Mithras* (Halsberghe 1972:115; Sanie 1981:267). En fait, il pourrait s'agir d'une dédicace au *Sol Invictus* romain et non pas d'une manifestation d'un de ces deux cultes. Or, compte tenu de la date attribuée à l'inscription — règne de Septime Sévère — il semble probable qu'il s'agisse de la divinité syrienne. Cependant, il est probable que Septime Sévère et Caracalla aient profité du culte du *Sol* romain déjà existant à travers le syncrétisme entre les deux dieux, comme il a été expliqué quelques pages avant.

En réalité, il s'agirait d'une situation très similaire à celle observée à Rome avec l'évolution du culte solaire depuis les dernières Antonins, en particulier Commode, jusqu'aux Sévères. Dans les dédicaces de ces trois sénateurs et commandants successifs de la légion *XIII Gemina* d'Apulum, siège du gouvernement des trois provinces de la Dacie, on peut observer la même évolution de ce *Sol Invictus* romain — créé par l'idéologie impériale qui cherchait un symbole représentant les caractéristiques de l'institution de la Principauté (gouvernement d'une seule personne, à caractère victorieux et bénéfique) — vers le *Sol Invictus Elagabal* syrien, introduit depuis le royaume de Septime Sévère. Ainsi, à l'époque de la dynastie Sévère, c'est probablement le dieu syrien qui est adoré mais assumant indubitablement les caractéristiques idéologiques ayant favorisé la création d'un *Sol Invictus* romain. Alors, ces trois

dédicaces des sénateurs sont donc des témoignages de loyauté politique et religieuse envers les respectifs empereurs et leur idéologie: Commode, Sévère et même Caracalla, selon la datation acceptée pour l'inscription de *Laetus*.

À Apulum aussi, *Lucius Varelius Felix*, qui semble d'origine romaine à cause de son nom et de la structure en *tria nomina*, dédia un monument épigraphique à *Deus Sol*, même si dans l'inscription il n'y a aucune spécification sur son occupation ou sur son statut social. De nouveau, il s'agirait d'une dédicace à *Sol Invictus* plutôt qu'à *Mithras*, bien que Vermaseren et Pintilie l'incluent dans leurs corpora de monuments mithriaques, comme il a été déjà dit (Rép. 4). Étant donné que l'inscription n'offre pas d'éléments pour sa datation, celle-ci ne peut évidemment pas contribuer à déterminer s'il s'agit du *Sol Invictus* romain ou du dieu syrien.

Probablement, une autre dédicace réalisée en deux langues, le latin et le grec, soit plus simple d'identifier du fait que le nom du dieu apparaît deux fois: *Sol Invictus* et *Ηλιος ανικητοζ* (sic) (Rép. 5). Compte tenu que le dédicant, *Αβεδαλλαθ* (*Abedallath*) porte un nom typiquement syrien ('BDLT: «serviteur d'*Allath*», divinité équivalente à *Athena* à Palmyre) (Sanie 1981:131–132), il est beaucoup plus probable qu'il s'agisse du *Sol Invictus* syrien — *Sol Invictus Elagabal* — et non pas de *Mithras* ni du *Sol Invictus* romain. Le dédicant aurait été probablement un pérégrin, bien qu'on ne puisse pas rejeter l'hypothèse d'un esclave.

Une inscription similaire dédiée à *Ηλιος ανικητοζ* a comme dédicant *Ερμης Γοργιου* (Hermès, fils/esclave/affranchi de Gorgias), d'origine grecque ou gréco orientale (Rép. 6). La présence de la tête d'un bœuf, d'un serpent et d'une gorgone dans le monument parle en faveur de son inclusion dans le répertoire de monuments mithriaques. Or, par analogie avec le texte de l'inscription précédente, on ne peut pas rejeter tout à fait l'appartenance au culte du *Sol Invictus* syrien et il faudrait encore signaler que la tête de bœuf était un attribut assez répandu chez les Baal syriens, bien que le serpent et la gorgone semblent, de toute façon, pointer plus nettement vers des rapports plus étroits avec le Mithraïsme.

Apulum est la première ville de la Dacie quant au nombre de monuments à caractère solaire, indépendamment du culte spécifique — oriental ou non — auquel les monuments peuvent être attribués et à

l'exception des possibles attributions à *Hercules*. Cette donnée correspond à la portée considérable du Mithraïsme dans la ville, car c'est la seconde ville avec le plus grand nombre de trouvailles mithriaques en Dacie, juste après Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (Carbó García 2010:131–133).

Au Nord-ouest d'Apulum, aux monts Apuseni, se trouvait *Alburnus Maior* (Roşia Montană) — centre principal d'exploitation minière d'or de la province — où un autel votif dédié au *Sol Augustus* a été découvert. C'est la première fois que l'épithète apparaît au registre épigraphique de la Dacie pour cette divinité (Rép. 1). Il s'agit probablement d'une manifestation du culte au *Sol Invictus* romain, avec un caractère plus idéologique auquel la propre épithète Augustus aurait été ajoutée, ce qui rapprocherait particulièrement cette dédicace à une manifestation du culte impérial (Bulzan 2005:335). Malheureusement, le texte épigraphique ne recueille ni le nom du dédicant ni aucune autre information.

Un dernier autel dédié au *Sol Invictus* dans la Dacie Apulensis provient de la région la plus orientale de la province, de la ville de Păuleni, d'où les Romains extrayaient du sel (Rép. 20). Le dédicant, *Caius Iulius Omucio*, était l'affranchi et l'administrateur de *Caius Iulius Valentinus*, chef du service des salines en Dacie; il portait un nom romain avec une structure de *tria nomina* et était vraisemblablement Romain (Sanie 1981:131). Un autre *Caius Iulius Valentinus* apparaît dans une autre inscription provenant d'Apulum dédiée à *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Aeternus*. Le personnage y apparaît comme premier *quattorvir* annuel et patron du collège des *fabri* du municipium *Septimium* à Apulum et il pourrait s'agir de la même personne (*CIL* III, 1083 = *IDR* III/5, 204). Dans ce cas, compte tenu de la datation provenant d'Apulum, le dédicant aurait alors exercé la charge de *quattorvir* entre 197 et 198 après J.C. C'est ainsi que cette dédicace à *Sol Invictus* pourrait être datée à la fin du II<sup>e</sup> siècle ou début du III<sup>e</sup> apr. J.C, mais en tout cas durant le règne de Septime Sévère, au plus tôt. Si cette date est acceptée et si l'on prend compte de la présence d'*Aeternus* — un dieu originaire sans doute du milieu géographique syrien — dans l'autre inscription, le monument serait attribuable au dieu syrien *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, bien que son nom ne soit pas au complet. En tout cas, à notre avis, il est beaucoup moins probable qu'il s'agisse d'une dédicace érigée à *Mithras*, tel

que Vermaseren ou, plus récemment, Pintilie semblaient penser (*CIMRM* II, n° 2011; Pintilie 2003:193, n° 82).

Dans la Dacie Porolissensis, quelques monuments problématiques ont aussi été découverts. Un autel votif dédié à l'*Invictus* par Aurelius Montanus, soldat de cette unité (Rép. 21) a été trouvé à la ville de *Potaissa* (actuelle Turda) — près de laquelle était cantonnée la légion *V Macedonia*. L'appellation simple, sans une mention réelle du nom de la divinité, pourrait signaler le dieu *Mithras*, ce qui semble très vraisemblable étant donné l'importance de l'élément militaire dans la diffusion de ce culte. Cependant, bien que ces possibilités nous semblent moins plausibles, on pourrait attribuer l'autel à *Sol Invictus* ou à une autre divinité ayant *Invictus* pour épithète habituelle. Halsberghe et Sanie considèrent que cet autel aurait plutôt appartenu au culte de *Sol Invictus*, puisqu'il n'a pas été trouvé dans un mithraeum, bien qu'ils l'interprètent comme le dieu syrien *Sol Invictus Elagabal* (Halsberghe 1972:39; Sanie 1981:127). Sans même mentionner *Sol*, cette interprétation semble vraiment risquée et peu plausible, tel qu'on l'a déjà souligné. Malheureusement, l'inscription n'offre aucun élément pour une datation précise pouvant aider à son interprétation. Un cas presque identique est celui d'une autre inscription de Ceanu Mic, près de Potaissa, dédiée également à l'*Invictus* par *Valerius Valerianus*, dont ni le métier ni le statut social ne sont spécifiés, bien que d'autres sujets avec le même nom soient connus dans le registre épigraphique de Sarmizegetusa et aussi dans celui d'Aquileia (Rép. 16).

Plus clair semble le dernier monument analysé. Il s'agit d'un autel votif découvert à *Napoca* (actuelle Cluj-Napoca), ville située 30 kilomètres au Nord-ouest de Potaissa. C'est une dédicace à *Deus Sol Invictus* de *Marcus Cocceius Genialis*, procureur de la Dacie Porolissensis, *equites* et *vir egregius*, probablement d'origine romaine ou italique (Rép. 19). Celle-ci était l'appellation la plus fréquemment utilisée à l'époque d'Aurélien pour la grande divinité solaire officielle intégratrice de l'Empire, bien que la datation de l'inscription la situe à une époque antérieure, entre 198 et 208 après J.C., lors du règne associé de Septime Sévère et de Caracalla. Cela pourrait signaler qu'il s'agit du *Sol Invictus* syrien, dont le culte a été introduit à Rome et dans tout l'Empire par ces empereurs. La dédicace, réalisée par un membre important du gouvernement impérial provincial, semble un clair témoignage de loyauté

politique et religieuse envers les empereurs et leur idéologie exprimé au moyen de la divinité syrienne. Celle-ci aurait assimilé — à son tour — les traits idéologiques du *Sol Invictus* romain qui le caractérisaient à l'époque antérieure tout en cherchant un symbole représentatif de l'institution de la Principauté. L'institution serait alors dans le monde, ce que *Sol* représentait pour l'univers : un gouvernement unique, victorieux et bénéfique.

## Conclusions

Après avoir exposé le problème et après avoir analysé les monuments concernés par les difficultés d'identification des divinités auxquelles ils ont été érigés, l'étude et le traitement séparés des probables attributions ainsi que leur inclusion dans de différents *corpora* monumentaux semble pertinent. En premier lieu, on observe des manifestations du caractère solaire d'autres cultes, telles que les dédicaces à *Malachbel*, *Iarhibol*, *Bussurigi* ou même Sérapis. Deuxièmement, il y a plusieurs monuments facilement attribuables à *Sol* ou au *Sol Invictus* romain n'ayant ce dernier ni un caractère syrien ni oriental, tel qu'il a été signalé plus haut. En troisième lieu, il existe aussi un ensemble d'inscriptions d'attribution très douteuse, non seulement au *Sol Invictus* syrien ou romain, mais aussi au Mithraïsme ou encore aux autres cultes non orientaux comme celui d'*Hercules*. Finalement, ce n'est que dans un petit nombre de cas que la dédicace est consacrée au dieu syrien, tel qu'il a été signalé dans les premières pages de ce chapitre à propos de la chronologie de ce culte dans l'Empire et de la présence — pas obligatoirement nécessaire — du nom de *Elagabal* dans le texte épigraphique, dans les inscriptions réalisées par des membres du collège des prêtres de cette divinité à Rome.

Malgré tout, ces possibles attributions — plus ou moins envisageables selon le cas — seraient toujours soumises aux interprétations des différents auteurs et dans cet article ce ne sont que mes propres interprétations, conditionnées par l'historiographie précédente, qui ont été fournies pour le problème de l'analyse générale dans l'ensemble de l'Empire romain et, en particulier, dans la Dacie.

Or, indépendamment de leur attribution au Mithraïsme, au *Sol Invictus* romain, au *Sol Invictus Elagabal* ou aux tentatives de souligner

le caractère solaire d'autres divinités orientales déjà commentées, ce que l'on peut observer pour la Dacie et en particulier pour Apulum, c'est l'essor progressif de la théologie solaire à partir des derniers Antonins pendant la dynastie des Sévères et après celle-ci, coïncidant aussi avec l'essor du Mithraïsme dans les trois provinces transdanubiennes. Malheureusement, la fin de ce processus n'est pas observable en Dacie, abandonnée en temps d'Aurélien, quelques années avant de sa réforme solaire (Nemeti 2005:306–316).

### Répertoire Des Inscriptions<sup>18</sup>

- 1: *Alburnus Maior* (Roşia Montană). Autel votif. 55 × 27 × 23 cm.  
Bibliographie: *AnnÉp* 1990, 850; *ILD* p. 165, n° 384.  
*Soli / Aug(usto)*
- 2: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Fragment d'autel votif ou base de statue. 23 × 22 × 13 cm.  
Bibliographie: *CIMRM* II, n° 1961; Sanie 1981:267, n° 64; *IDR* III/5, 287.  
*Invict[o] / [d]eo vo- / [tum sol(vit)?] / [—?]*
- 3: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Autel votif ou base de statue.  
Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 1118; *CIMRM* II, n° 1952; Sanie 1981:267, n° 62; *IDR* III/5, 350.  
*Soli / Q(uintus) Marcius Vi- / ctor Felix Ma- / ximillianus leg(atus) / Augg(ustorum) leg(ionis) XIII G(eminae) et / Pullaiena Cael- / iana c(larissima) f(emina) eius / et P(ublius) Marcius Vi- / ctor Maximilli- / anus c(larissimus) p(uer) filius / voto*
- 4: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Autel votif ou base de statue. 63 × 35 × 30 cm.  
Bibliographie: *AnnÉp* 1944, 31; *CIMRM*, II, n° 1946; Sanie 1981:267, n° 63; *IDR* III/5, 351.  
*D(eo) S(oli) / L(ucius) Val(erius) Felix / v(otum) s(olvit)*
- 5: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Autel votif ou base de statue.  
Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 1107; *CIMRM* II, n° 1999; Sanie 1981:266, n° 59; *IDR* III/5, 352; *CIGD*, n° 20.

<sup>18)</sup> Les inscriptions sont présentées en abrégé et seulement les références bibliographiques les plus générales y sont incluses et non nécessairement leur première publication.

*Soli invic-* / *to votum* / Ἡλίῳ ἀνικήτω / εὐχὴν ἀνέθη- / κεν / Ἀβεδαλλαθ

- 6: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Autel votif. 52 × 30 cm.

Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 7781; *CIMRM* II, n° 1984; *IDR* III/5, 355; *CIGD*, n° 21.

Ἡλίῳ / ἀνεικίη- / τῷ Ἑρμ- / ῆς Γοργί- / ου ἀνέθηκε

- 7: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Autel votif ou base de statue.

Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 1013; *CIMRM* II, n° 1969; Sanie 1981:266, n° 58; *IDR* III/5, 353.

*Soli* / *invicto* / *Q(uintus) Caecil(ius)* / *Laetus* / *leg(atus) Aug(usti)* / *leg(ionis) XIII G(eminae)* / *v(otum) l(ibens) s(olvit)*

- 8: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Autel votif ou base de statue.

Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 1111; *CIMRM* II, n° 1968; *IDR* III/5, 354.

*Soli invicto* / *aedem restituit* / *C(aius) Caerellius* / *Sabinus* / *leg(atus) Aug(usti)* / *leg(ionis) XIII Gem(inae)*

- 9: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Autel votif ou base de statue.

Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 1114; *CIMRM* II, n° 1998; Sanie 1981:267, n° 61; *IDR* III/5, 356.

[*Deo? Soli? in-*] / *victo pro sa-* / *lute imp(erii) p(opuli)q(ue) R(omani)* / *et ordinis col(oniae)* / *Apul(ensis) C(aius) Iul(ius) Va-* / *har(uspex) col(oniae) s(upra) s(criptae)* / *et antistes hu-* / *iusque loci* / *v(oto) l(ibens) p(osuit)*

Autre lecture possible pour les deux premières lignes: [*Herculi in-*] / *victo*.

- 10: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Statuette en bronze de *Sol*, avec inscription. 30 cm.

Bibliographie: *AnnÉp* 1962, 208; *IDR* III/5, 358.

*M(arcus) Aurel(ius) Sila a-* / *ctar(ius) eq(uitum)* / *sing(ularium) pro se et suos v(otum) l(ibens) s(olvit)*

- 11: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Fragment de statuette votive. 17,5 × 24 × 8,5 cm.

Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 14475; *CIMRM* II, n° 1970; *IDR* III/5, 357.

[*?Deo ?Sol*]/*i invicto* / [*pro sal(ute)*] *imperi(i)* / [---] Autre lecture possible pour la première ligne: [*Hercul*]/*i invicto*

- 12: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Autel votif. 98 × 61 × 38 cm.

Bibliographie: *IDR* III/5, 720; *AnnÉp* 2001, 1720.



*Invi[cto] / deo pro / salute C(ai) Iu[l(ii)] / Rufini l[ibe-] / rorumqu(e)  
/ [eiu]s Spatalu[s] / [se]r(vus) actor / [v(otum)] s(olvit) l(ibens) l(aetus)  
m(erito)*

- 13: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Autel votif. 61 × 29 × 17 cm.  
Bibliographie: *AnnÉp* 1944, 32; *IDR* III/5, 207.  
*I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / Soli Bus- / surigio / P(ublius) Decem- /  
ber (A)elius / v(otum) p(osuit)*
- 14: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Autel votif. 124 × 57 × 56 cm.  
Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 7771; *IDR* III/5, 319.  
*Sarapidi / Iovi Soli / Isidi Lunae / Dianae / dis deabusq(ue) /  
conservatorib(us) / L(ucius) Aemil(ius) Carus / leg(atus) Aug(usti)  
pr(o) pr(aetore) / III Daciarum*
- 15: *Apulum* (Alba Iulia). Autel votif ou base de statue.  
Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 1108; Sanie 1981:276, n° 105; *IDR* III/5, 103.  
*Deo Soli / Hieribolo / Aur(elius) Bas- / sinus dec(urio) / col(oniae)  
Aequens(is) / sacerd(os) nu- / minum v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens)  
m(erito)*
- 16: *Ceanu Mic*. Autel votif ou base de statue.  
Bibliographie: Sanie 1981:269, n° 73; *ILD* p. 215, n° 535.  
*Inv(icto) / V(alerius) Va(lerianus) / vo(tum) po(suit)*
- 17: *Germisara* (Cigmău). Autel votif. 45 × 25 × 20 cm.  
Bibliographie: Sanie 1981:269, n° 72; *IDR* III/3, 221.  
*Soli Inv- / icto sac- / rum Ael(ius) / Iulius s(olvit) / l(ibens) m(erito)*
- 18: *Micia* (Vețel). Autel votif. 90 × 60 × 42 cm.  
Bibliographie: *AnnÉp* 1971, 384; Sanie 1981:269, n° 70; *IDR* III/3, 49.  
*Deo / invicto / [P(ublius)] Ael(ius) Eupho- / rus pro / salute sua / et  
suorum / templum a solo / fecit*
- 19: *Napoca* (Cluj-Napoca). Autel votif. 72 × 26 × 24 cm.  
Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 7662; *CIMRM* II, 273, n° 1916; Sanie 1981:268, n° 67.  
*[D]eo Soli / [i]nvicto / pro salute sua / et suorum / M(arcus) Cocc(eius)  
Genia- / lis v(ir) e(gregius) proc(urator) / Augg(ustorum) nn(ostrorum)  
/ prov(inciae) Dac(iae) Porol(issensis) / v(otum) l(ibens) m(erito)  
p(osuit)*

- 20: Păuleni. Autel votif. 94 × 49 × 43 cm.  
Bibliographie: *AnnÉp* 1937, 141; *CIMRM* II, 294, n° 2011; Sanie 1981:269, n° 71; *IDR* III/4, 248.  
*Soli inv- / icto pro / salutem / C(ai) Iuli Valen- / tini c(onductoris) salinar(um) / Iulius Omucio / libertus actor / posuit*
- 21: Potaissa (Turda). Autel votif. 55 × 26 × 24 cm.  
Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 879; *CIMRM* II, 276, n° 1929; *AnnÉp* 1967, 396; Sanie 1981:268, n° 68; *ILD* 207, n° 506.  
*Invic[t]o / Aur(elius) Mon- / tanus mil(es) / leg(ionis) V Mace(donicae) / l(ibens) p(osuit)*
- 22: Sucidava (Celei-Corabia). Base de statue fragmentaire.  
Bibliographie: *IDR* II, 202; *AnnÉp* 1979, 508; *ILD*, 79, n° 106.  
*[?Deo] So[li] inv(icto) pro s(alute) / [eor(um)] Ma[rinus] et Iuli(anus) p(osuerunt)*  
Autre lecture possible pour la première ligne: *[Hercu]li inv(icto)*.
- 23: Tibiscum (Jupa). Autel votif. 140 × 70 × 50 cm.  
Bibliographie: *IDR* III/1, 137; Sanie 1981:276, n° 107.  
*Deo Soli / Ierhaboli / pro salutem / d[[d(ominorum)]] n[[n(ostrorum)]] Aug[[g(ustorum)]] / Aurel(ius) Laecanius / Paulinus vet(eranus) / ex c(ustode) a(rmorum) coh(ortis) I Vind(elicorum) / et dec(urio) col(oniae) Sarmiz(egetusae) / v(otum) l(ibens) s(olvit)*
- 24: Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (Grădiște-Sarmizegetusa). Autel votif. 98 × 39 × 30 cm.  
Bibliographie: *AnnÉp* 1930, 135; *AnnÉp* 1933, 13; *IDR* III/2, 246; Sanie 1981:267, n° 65.  
*I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / Iunoni [M]inervae / diis consentibus / Saluti Fortunae / reduci Apollini / Dianae v[ic]trici / Nemesi Me[r]curio / Herculi Soli Invicto / Aesculapio Hygiae diis / deabusq(ue) immortalib(us) / P(ublius) Aelius Hammonius / v(ir) e(gregius) proc(urator) Aug[g(ustorum)]*
- 25: Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (Grădiște-Sarmizegetusa). Autel ou dalle votive.  
Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 7952; *CIMRM* II, 322, n° 2148; *IDR* III/2, 280; Sanie 1981:268, n° 66.  
*Soli invic(to) / L(ucius) Domitius / Primanus / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*

- 26: *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa* (Grădiște-Sarmizegetusa). Quatre fragments d'une plaque en marbre. 38 × 33 × 2,3 cm.  
Bibliographie: Piso 2004:299–303; *ILD*, p. 136, n° 283.  
[?...] / [...] *Dei* / [*Solis Ierh*] *abolis* / [...?] *Vale*] *ntinus* / [...?] *t*] *ribu*[*n(us)*] / [...]
- 27: *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa* (Grădiște-Sarmizegetusa). Fragment d'autel votif. 33 × 33 × 11 cm.  
Bibliographie: *CIL* III, 7956; *IDR* III/2, 265; Sanie 1981:277, n° 110.  
[*D*] *eo Soli* / [*Mal*] *agbel-* / [*o?*... *el*]

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### Abréviations

<i>AMN</i>	<i>Acta Musei Napocensis</i>
<i>AnnÉp</i>	<i>L'Année Épigraphique</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt</i>
BABesch	Bulletin Antieke Beschaving
<i>CahÉtAnc</i>	Cahiers des études anciennes
<i>CIGD</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum graecarum Dacicarum</i> , Debrecen, 2003 (Ligia Ruscu)
CIL	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum
<i>CIMRM</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis Mithriacae</i> , La Haye, 1956 et 1960 (M. J. Vermaseren).
<i>EPRO</i>	<i>Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain</i> .
HAnt	Historia Antiqua
<i>IDR</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Daciae Romanae (Inscripțiile Daciei Romane)</i>
<i>ILD</i>	<i>Inscripții Latine din Dacia</i> , Bucharest, 2005 (C. C. Petolescu)
<i>RGRW</i>	<i>Religions of the Graeco-Roman World</i>
<i>RH</i>	<i>Revue Historique</i>
<i>RIC</i>	<i>The Roman Imperial Coinage</i>
<i>SCIV / SCIVA</i>	<i>Studii și cercetări de Istorie Veche (și Arheologie)</i>

## Book Reviews

*The Challenge of the Silver Screen, An Analysis of the Cinematic Portraits of Jesus, Rama, Buddha, and Muhammad.* By FREEK L. BAKKER. (Studies in Religion and the Arts, Vol. 1). Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009. 282 pp. ISBN-10: 9004168613 (hbk.) ISBN-13: 978-9004168619 (hbk.).

“The introduction of film caused a great upheaval in all great religions of the world. It meant a new confrontation with the ancient question concerning the permissibility of depicting transcendence or, to put it in a more popular way: is one allowed to make images of God?” (p. 247). Freek Bakker focuses on this question by tracing the development of a broad corpus of film productions down through the history of cinema. The study selects films that deal with a central religious figure, specifically, Jesus, Rama, Buddha and Muhammad. The focus lies not directly on the single film production but rather on the narrative linked to the central character, always at the boundary between human and transcendent being.

The book, divided into seven parts, has a circular structure. Beginning with an analysis of the cinematic portrait of Jesus, it leads on to the filmic presentations of Rama and then of Buddha (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). Muhammad, a very particular case within film history, completes the panorama (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 resumes the characterization of Jesus, but discusses productions from outside Europe and the US. The introduction and conclusion (Chapters 1 and 7) frame the case studies, and delineate the main lines followed by this study, as well as the study’s purpose and methodological approach.

The book deals with very different religious traditions and central figures that are not directly comparable with respect to their function, significance and role. The common ground for comparison is the medium itself: film and cinema are presented from an historical perspective, as a new medium that was slowly integrated within religious symbol systems, particularly within theological discourses and iconographic traditions. The book shows, in a convincing way, how films dealing with central divine characters became very important for presenting and promoting rather conservative images of those figures. They were produced and screened because of their unique potential

to widely disseminate religious portraits both within and beyond the frontiers of traditions, languages and nationalities, reaching audiences at different levels within societies.

Each of the case studies follows a similar pattern: each begins with an overview of the film history of the central figure who is the focus of the chapter, before outlining which films have been selected for closer analysis, from this broader corpus. The analysis of the cinematic portraits concentrates on the narrative mode with some consideration of the style. In a further step, the author compares the cinematic portraits with the main theological lineaments of the characters in written and iconographic traditions. The multiple receptions of these films are therefore situated in two contexts: first, the broader context of religious traditions, in which dominant theological patterns are assessed, and second — and a significant strength of this book — from the particular visual culture of each religious setting.

The comparison between the filmic productions portraying Jesus, Rama, Buddha, and Muhammad demonstrate very different ways of producing and receiving films with an explicit and central religious character. Some productions were targeted at believers within a given religious tradition (as was the case for most of the films about Jesus or Rama), whilst others had a campaign role to promote and explain a religious tradition to a foreign audience (for instance in the solitary case of a film about Muhammad, *MUHAMMAD, MESSENGER OF GOD*). Some films are based on self-reflection within a religious tradition, whilst others deal with foreign traditions that are explored from an outsider perspective. A good illustration of the latter approach is provided by Bertolucci's *THE LITTLE BUDDHA*.

The conclusion of the study synthesizes some common points that arose from the analysis of these diverse films and religious traditions. It notes how the most successful productions, both in terms of diffusion and economic revenue, always reproduce common, traditional elements. This adherence of successful film production to the theological mainstream correlates with the predominance of the mode of classical narration in these films. Equally striking is the discussion of a tendency to transfer the religious quality of the narrative to the leading actor playing the role of the central character; in some cases, because of their role in the film, they were considered not only as cinema stars but also as holy persons in a religious sense. Furthermore, a particular concern for plausibility within this sector of film production has entailed giving the spatial environment an important role, presenting and using sacred places as a key element in the transmission of theological thought.

The portraits of central religious figures produced in and through cinema have become an important means of diffusing religious topics in a global per-



spective. The question about the adequacy of translating central religious concerns into a filmic language has, historically, been answered positively. In most cases, the interaction between religious authorities, theological narrative and norms, film production, reception, distribution, financial revenue and political regulation has worked in ways that have sustained the new medium, its challenges and possibilities.

This volume is rich, dense and offers an original contribution to the broad field of film and religion. The films are considered as religious discourses or part of such discourses; the interaction between films and central theological concerns within the chosen religious settings are placed at the core of such interest. Films are presented as peculiar but integral parts of a religious tradition that interacts with other aspects of religious practices and discourses. For instance, Rama films are seen by some audiences as closely related to ritual practices such as the experience of *darshan*.

Of course, dealing with four traditions that have a global relevance and a pluri-millennial history involves some simplification and a concentration on main lines. Although cinematic art is strongly influenced by its Western roots, the corpus of forty films considered encompasses productions from countries all over the world. This global aspect could be analysed in a deeper and more comprehensive fashion, particularly with regard to the style and the aesthetic. Furthermore, it is surprising that a book published in a new series dealing with religion and art does not consider using images and film-stills to outline and compare representational strategies at a visual level.

Freek Bakker has chosen a comparative approach to the topic concentrating on both the common lines, and the peculiarities and variety of films, and their production and reception. In doing so, he offers an insightful and interesting introduction to cinema as a global medium that has produced, and continues to produce, a peculiar interaction between narratives, images, and cultural perspectives from both inside and outside the frontiers of religious traditions.

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*Introducing Daoism*. By LIVIA KOHN. New York: Routledge, 2009. 296 pp. ISBN-10: 0415439981 ISBN-13: 978-0415439985 (pbk.).

Anyone who has included Daoism in a course on “world religions” and has marked exams and essays on this topic might share the impression that students have much more difficulties with understanding this religious tradition than with most of the other great religions. This is presumably due to the extremely complex history of that tradition with its numerous local variants. It is also due to the peculiar teaching methods of the Daoist traditions themselves. Finally, the history of Western academic studies of Daoism is very short, and few useful introductory works have been written that address neither highly specialized experts nor a broad lay and esoteric public but an educated readership such as students and academics.

Livia Kohn has written the first introduction to Daoism that takes the format of a college textbook. For those familiar with her work it appears like a note form summary of her broad range of published works, especially her *Daoism and Chinese Culture*. The book is organized in an “introduction” plus 13 chapters of roughly equal length (all between 15 and 20 pp.) that are grouped in four parts. Each chapter is structured didactically in starting with a short abstract of the main contents of the chapter followed by a list of 4–7 bullet-points of the ‘main topics covered’ which basically give the main subtitles of the chapters. At the end of each chapter a half-page summary of ‘Key-points you need to know’ is added in the form of a grey boxed list of 3–6 bullet-points followed by three ‘Discussion questions’ which in most cases try to relate the historical material to present day life, and a list of 8–11 English works for ‘Further reading’ (Anna Seidel’s *La divinisation de Lao-tseu* is the only French book included!). Other helpful didactic devices can be found at the beginning and end of the book: a ‘Dynastic chart’, ‘Pronunciation guide’ and ‘Map of China’ follow the table of contents; two appendices on the ‘Chronology of Daoist History’ including major events (8 pp.) and on ‘The Daoist Canon’ (4 pp.); a glossary with Daoist terms and an index conclude the book. We do not find a single Chinese character in the text of the book (including glossary and index). The book thus mainly addresses English speaking students of religion.

The author has chosen to avoid lengthy narratives, the chapters are divided into 4–6 parts that are further divided into 2–5 subparts, that are sometimes further divided so that no titled unit exceeds one page, in most cases they are one-third to half a page long. The titles of the chapters and their subdivisions consist mainly of systematic comparative terms, the whole book thus appears like a topology of Daoism cast into the five main vessels of 1. an introduction

that does not introduce the book but rather the theme in giving the historical ‘Background to Daoism’ in the ancestral cult of the Shang, *Yijing* divination and Warring States philosophical schools; 2. a first part that introduces the ‘Foundations’ of the two books *Daode jing* and *Zhuangzi* as well as concepts relating to health and immortality and ideas about the cosmos, gods and governance; 3. a second part that provides an overview of the historical development of Daoism with introductions to the main schools (15 pp.), ethics/community, pantheon and religious practices (the kind of systematic comparative terms referred to above); 4. a third part that focuses on modern Daoism in China and the West; and a fourth part that is called ‘Reflections’ and presents concluding thoughts on ‘Key characteristics of Daoism,’ ‘Evolution of study,’ ‘Current trends,’ and ‘Activities and resources’ including academic associations, publications, useful dictionaries, websites, international conferences and workshops. The book thus is a topological introduction to Daoism that has many characteristics of a practical manual, a dictionary or a catalogue.

Although Kohn tries to arrange the topics in a chronological order the many units are often not connected to each other and appear as listings of information. We do not find lengthy quotes of Daoist texts and very little historical narrative, in the entire book 12 lines are devoted to Zhang Daoling, for example, one of the most adored figures in Daoism, there are no attempts to interpret meanings of texts or practices à la Robinet, Schipper (even in his topological *Corps taoïste*) or in the way Kohn did herself in *Early Chinese Mysticism* and other books. The strength of this kind of arrangement is that it manages to include a great part of the innumerable aspects of Daoism. Its weakness lies in the lack of a red thread that links these manifold aspects, a thread that would be particularly helpful for the organisation of the kind of basic and introductory knowledge that the book intends to impart to the beginner students for whom it is written.

Any introduction on such a vast religious culture as “Daoism” necessarily has to focus on some aspects and to neglect other aspects. This book is extremely rich in scope and builds on the exceptionally broad erudition of an author who like few others is able to formulate research based generalisations. Students, however, do not always understand these generalisations as reductive résumés of lengthy studies but take them as authoritative predications. Further misunderstandings might occur with the term “Modern Daoism” (chap. 10) which refers to 10th–16th century Daoism and does not cover the period between 1500 and 1945 which (for no clear reasons) is absent in the book. A great strength in the first chapters is the inclusion of a number of excavated manuscripts that provide an important context of early Daoism. However, some mistakes can be found in the presentation of the transmitted

early texts: the *Yijing* was not compiled by Confucius around 500 BC (p. 5), legalism was not first formulated by Xunzi (p. 10), Yin and Yang do not play any role in the *Daode jing* (as repeatedly mentioned on pp. 24 and 25), they are mentioned only incidentally in chapter 42 of the Wang Bi version but the whole chapter does not appear either in the Guodian fragments or in the Mawangdui version A, while in Mawangdui version B exactly this passage is missing so we don't know whether Yin and Yang were mentioned there. There are also no indications that the sage in the *Daode jing* acts 'like a sacred shaman king,' he also does not, in my view, 'impart purity and harmony to others' (p. 26) or 'leads the country to a full recovery of cosmic harmony' (p. 27). In chapter 2 on *Zhuangzi* two major aspects of the text are missing, the many important passages on language and logic and the strong humour which characterizes his unique style. Missing is also a selective bibliography with major introductory works at the end; that the chapter bibliographies ignore the whole non-English (especially the rich French) literature on Daoism is in my view an utterly wrong signal to American and English students.

Apart from these few shortcomings the book is an extremely helpful and rich source for the introductory study of Daoism. It contains many themes that are missing in other introductions such as the last chapters on contemporary Daoism and reflections on the nature and study of Daoism. If it overloads beginners with too many unrelated facts it still gives them a very good sense of the great complexity and diversity of the Daoist tradition, its main veins and manifestations. It is, in my view, a hugely useful and valuable general map for those who take it as a guiding manual to the intricate landscape of Daoism and are willing to advance further into it by following the advice in the carefully chosen suggestions for further reading included in the book.

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*Riven by Lust. Incest and Schism in Indian Buddhist Legend and Historiography.* By JONATHAN A. SILK. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009. xviii + 347 pp. ISBN 978-0-8248-3090-8 (hbk.).

A sure way to get the attention of one's audience when lecturing on the intricate issue of early schisms within the Buddhist community is to tell the tale of Mahādeva, the figure associated in the Sarvāstivāda *Mahāvibhāṣā* with the promulgation of five controversial theses and the ensuing first major schism in the Buddhist community, the scission between Mahāsāṃghika and Sthavira that took place about a century after the Buddha's death. Indeed, the story of Mahādeva's early life not only outdoes the scenario of many TV soap operas, but also involves a pattern that a modern reader is bound to identify as having an "oedipal" or "Freudian" twist: Mahādeva, who starts having sex with his mother while his father is away, proceeds to assassinate the latter upon his return; this patricide is followed by the murder of an arhat likely to reveal the crime, and then Mahādeva kills his own mother, whom he suspects of having found another lover.

This tale of sex and violence framed in a sectarian historical narrative constitutes the starting point of Jonathan Silk's inquiry in *Riven by Lust*. In the twenty chapters of this captivating book, Silk adds multifaceted pieces to the Mahādeva file, contextualizing this pivotal tale not only with regard to the Indian milieu and the Buddhist sub-culture, but also from the broader angle of human psychology and world literature. Silk's central claim is that this biographical background was forged by the authors of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, who belonged to a sub-branch of the Sthavira, with the purpose of casting discredit on the Five Theses by demonizing their author, and that this "forgery" is not a work of fiction, but the skillful adaptation of another narrative, crafted for polemical purposes. Two major orientations in Silk's inquiry thus stem from his analysis of Mahādeva's story: the first addresses the making of the forgery and the sources used by the authors of the *Vibhāṣā*, the second centers on the issue of the intended rhetorical impact of the story, that is, mainly on the reaction expected from the audience regarding Mahādeva's actions, in particular, his act of incest.

Silk identifies the model for Mahādeva's life in the story of Dharmaruci — another Buddhist incestuous murderer — recounted in the *Divyāvadāna*, a work of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school which was a kin-school to the Sarvāstivāda. The *Dharmarucyavadāna*, further, is shown to exhibit a pattern that can be repeatedly found in narratives across sectarian boundaries. Chapters 1, 3 and 5 of *Riven by Lust* examine the story of Mahādeva and its retelling in East Asian and Tibetan sources. Chapters 7 and 11 examine the basic narrative

pattern of the oedipal criminal impersonated by Dharmaruci in the *Dharmarucyavadāna* and its poetic retelling by Kṣemendra, and chapter 12 surveys its occurrence in other sources, including Mahāsāṃghika literature.

Chapters 8 and 10 focus on the transformations applied to the scenario of Dharmaruci's tale that resulted in the calumnious account of Mahādeva's life. Silk convincingly demonstrates that the demonization of Mahādeva proceeds by a recasting of the Dharmaruci tale, in which the vectors of action in the mother-son incestuous relation are switched, a crucial change that leads to Mahādeva bearing full responsibility not only for his sexual misconduct (he is no longer the victim of a "bedtrick," as was Dharmaruci, but the conscious perpetrator of incest), but also for the murders that ensue.

The second orientation of Silk's inquiry addresses the suppositions underlying the use of the Mahādeva story as a polemical argument. The purpose of its use is obvious and the principle of the argument is clearly intelligible: the narrative has the function of an *ad hominem* argument, touching here on the relationship between the trustworthiness of a teacher and the authority of his teaching. Presenting Mahādeva as disreputable aims at denying authority to the Five Theses he promulgated. For the calumny to be efficient, a context is needed in which the audience will heap opprobrium on Mahādeva on account of the deeds attributed to him. Silk's core contention, already disclosed in the subtitle of his book, is that *incest* plays a central role in the polemical agenda of the *Vibhāṣā* authors. This claim, however, stands askew to Silk's observation that incest is in fact not as highlighted as might have been expected in either the story of Dharmaruci or Mahādeva. Indeed, the crimes that are emphasized in both versions are essentially the patricide, matricide, and the murder of the arhat — three sins that belong to the fivefold category of the "sins of immediate retribution" (*ānantaryakarma*), i.e., sins that, according to the Buddhists, result in immediate rebirth in hell. Silk thus sets out to demonstrate, on the one hand, that this lack of highlight does not result from an attitude towards incest in the Indian or Indian Buddhist context that would differ from "our own," and, on the other hand, that even though this crime is kept low-key in the *Vibhāṣā*, it plays a major role, if not *the* major role, in the *ad hominem* argumentation. The first point leads Silk to a systematic contextual appraisal of Buddhist attitudes, and more generally of Indian attitudes, with regard to sin in general (chapter 4), and to incest in particular.

Comparatively, the topic of "schism" receives only a limited amount of attention. The notion of "schism" and the accounts of traditional sources and modern scholarship concerning the Mahāsāṃghika/Sthavira bisection and the Five Theses are discussed in chapter 2. Chapter 5 examines sources other than the *Vibhāṣā* that also blame Mahādeva for a schism, either between

Mahāsāṃghika and Sthavira, or among Mahāsāṃghika. Chapter 6 comes back to discussing the traditional sources (including or not a Mahādeva-like protagonist) accounting for the schism in a historical frame.

A major part of *Riven by Lust* is thus devoted to the exploration of Indian stance(s) toward incest and of the representations of incest (or lack thereof) in various areas of Indian literature. Silk surveys an impressive corpus in Sanskrit, Pāli, Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan, and further, introduces examples from medieval literature and the Hebrew Bible as a means, on the one hand, to understand attitudes towards morality and deviance in the wider frame of Indian society, and even of humanity as a whole, and on the other hand, by way of parallelism and contrast, to draw out the specificities involved in the crafting of Mahādeva's tale. Silk provides here a fascinating introduction to an astonishing literary corpus — one is surprised, in particular, to learn how many former criminal and morally depraved figures are found among the great disciples of the Buddha...

The relevant stories are translated in a very pleasant and extremely readable way (Silk has avoided burdening the text with square brackets or multiple footnotes). I regretted that the original texts were not systematically provided in the endnotes, or in an appendix. The textual basis established by Silk for some of the principal pieces of his corpus was published in earlier articles, where the relevant material is edited and translated. Readers who would like to “see for themselves” can refer in particular to the *Indo-Iranian Journal* 51 (2008): 137–185 for the edited text of Dharmaruci's story in the *Divyāvadāna* and Kṣemendra's *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā*, and to *Studies in Indian Philosophy and Buddhism* 15 (2008): 27–46 for that of Mahādeva's story in Tibetan sources.

Silk's literary inquiry provides ample evidence that the Indian context, inclusive of the Buddhist sub-culture, displays a general condemnation of incest, whether within its own society or in a neighboring country (in this regard, Silk discusses in chapter 9 the famous trope of the “incestuous Persians”). If incest is frowned upon in the Indian context, it is nevertheless in no way a “taboo” in the sense of an unimaginable act. The depiction of incestuous relations is well within the range of the classical Indian imagination in both the Hindu and Buddhist sub-cultures, and even becomes a casual plot device in stories, as is illustrated by the tale of Utpalavarṇā from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, discussed in chapter 14.

The qualification of the Mahādeva's story as “oedipal” brings further issues pertaining to incest to the fore. These involve literary aspects (the pattern of the oedipal tale by Sophocles, and the question of a possible influence from Greek literature on the parallel Indian pattern [p. 94]) and psychoanalytic

ones, for which Freud is the paradigm. In chapters 15 and 17, Silk, taking the “Oedipus complex” in a general way as “some combination of intergenerational sexual and aggressive relations,” (p. 164) reconsiders the “Indian Oedipus,” challenging the hypotheses of A.K. Ramanujan and Robert Goldman by making use of the Buddhist material and providing additional evidence of frequent depictions of mother-son incest, either direct or indirect (i.e., involving mother-figure and son-figures, following the pattern of the “Joseph and the wife of Potiphar” motif discussed in chapter 16). Silk excludes from his sample the “oedipal” representations found in tantric literature in view of its symbolic and provocative character. I remain curious as to Silk’s stance on the well-known “Freudian passage” from Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, which he merely alludes to in a note (p. 269, n. 5).

Silk also introduces modern discussions and clinical observations on incest. Although these provide the reader with an informed background on the topic, it appeared to me that Silk’s interest in the subject leads him at times to pursue his documenting enterprise into areas that fail to prove fully pertinent to the central task at hand. For instance, regarding the discussion on the psychological impact of an incest trauma in chapter 8, insofar as the narratives examined do not connect childhood abuse with later criminality (p. 80), whether or not clinical research confirms violent tendencies in victims of incest is not particularly relevant to make sense of the story in question and its authors’ intention.

Regarding the starting point, the tale of Mahādeva, Silk collects in chapters 13 through 17 persuasive external evidence for the claim that Mahādeva’s relationship with his mother, even if it is not emphasized in the *Vibhāṣā* in the way his three sins of immediate retribution are, still would have qualified, for an Indian audience, as reprehensible. Furthermore, the re-orientation of the relationship, which results in having the son defile his mother rather than being victimized, would have made Mahādeva appear especially despicable.

Let us note that the model story in the *Dharmarucyavadāna* itself provides internal evidence of a social context hostile to incest, and shows no sign of presupposing an audience not aware, or not agreeing with this attitude: in order to live as a couple, Dharmaruci and his mother have to flee to another region where their family relationship is unknown; the subsequent murder of the arhat is also explained by their fear that he would disclose the actual nature of their relationship. In contrast, when the authors of the *Vibhāṣā* explain Mahādeva and his mother’s flight to another region, the “deed” that they want to avoid being disclosed is, as the syntax suggests, not their incestuous relationship but Mahādeva’s first murder. I am inclined to think that the same interpretation applies to the reason prompting the murder of the arhat, contrary to Silk, who interprets the “crime” that the arhat might disclose as referring to the incestuous relationship (p. 19).



The tale of Mahādeva thus does not provide internal evidence for a contextual attitude towards incest (unless a negative connotation is associated with the term “defiling” used to describe the relationship), but the *Vibhāṣā* itself does: since the authors of the *Vibhāṣā* also resort to the Persian trope to illustrate moral turpitude (p. 86), there is no doubt about their own attitude toward incest, or that presupposed from their readership. One can thus agree with Silk that “one can hardly argue that the *Vibhāṣā*’s failure to draw explicit attention to Mahādeva’s incest signifies its unimportance.” (p. 224)

But in what way can it be said that incest is “central to the project of the *Vibhāṣā*’s authors” (p. 87)? There are two ways, it appears to me, in which Silk wants to qualify incest as “central” to the Mahādeva calumny. One of them concerns the manner in which the sexual dynamics is put to use by the authors of the *Vibhāṣā* to demonize Mahādeva, turning a victim into an active protagonist, thereby ensuring that the tale would generate censure from the audience. In this sense, one can grant that “the sexual dynamics of the tale is also central to their depiction and calumny of Mahādeva.” (p. 163) On the other hand, Silk also appears to hint at the centrality of incest in view of its impact on the audience, namely, that it would influence people’s judgment of Mahādeva in a way that is superior, or at least different, from murder. Silk qualifies incest as being “so frequently considered, in India as elsewhere, the paradigm of immorality.” (p. 3) Nevertheless, the hierarchy of moral sins in the Buddhist system does not reflect this claim: incest is not included in the five sins of immediate retribution. It is, as Silk discusses (chap. 4), included in a parallel category, in which mother-son incest figures as the “extension” of matricide. But such a category, Silk notes, is not invoked in the tales under consideration and was maybe even unknown to the authors of the *Vibhāṣā*. Thus, technically speaking, incest is not the worst crime committed by Mahādeva. Does Silk, by mentioning a universal “abhorrence of incest,” want to imply that incest figures as a crime which touches an audience at a more “instinctive” level, appealing to a more intuitive sense of wrongness rather than to reasoned notions of sins’ hierarchy, of acts and retribution? Silk seeks to answer the question of the origin of this abhorrence in chapter 19, discussing modern models by Edward Westermarck (aversion following childhood propinquity leading to the development of prohibitions) and Sigmund Freud (spontaneous incestuous attraction combated by prohibitions), drawing interesting differentiations between incest and inbreeding and between restrictions on marriage and sexual relations. This, however, does not provide grounds for explaining why incest would be felt more repulsive than, for that matter, parricide.

The question whether the audience would indeed have, as Silk appears to, perceived Mahādeva’s incest as “the most indecent” raises a pertinent question:

who was actually the intended audience of the *Vibhāṣā*? Whom was the calumny rhetoric supposed to convince? While Silk initially has in view a “traditional Indian audience” (p. 2), he subsequently defines it more precisely by pointing to the “private” character of the *Vibhāṣā*; it was a work not addressing a large public, but rather a restricted circle of monks, maybe even only learned ones (chap. 18). Might it be that monks are more prone to condemn transgressive sexuality than transgressive murder?

At the other pole of the question lies the agenda of the authors of the *Vibhāṣā*. Was incest, in their view, essential in the making of an archetype of a disreputable anti-hero? The responsabilization of Mahādeva, let us not forget, does not concern the mother-son incest alone, but the three murders as well; were three intentionally committed sins of immediate retribution not enough to vilify Mahādeva? If the authors of the *Vibhāṣā* picked Dharmaruci’s story *because* it had incest in it, was it for the expected specific shock-effect, an overkill accumulation of bad actions or — an option that Silk does not consider — in view of some symbolic meaning incest might have been conceived to have in relation to schism? The second option can at least arguably be ruled out: the authors of the *Vibhāṣā* could have adapted Dharmaruci’s story in order to attribute a further sin of immediate retribution to Mahādeva — Dharmaruci’s committing arson on monasteries could have been turned into stūpa destruction, an action analogue to “shedding the blood of a Buddha,” the fourth sin of immediate retribution — but they did not do this. Nor did they charge Mahādeva with, for instance, stealing; another sin a monk audience might have been receptive to. Did the *Vibhāṣā*’s authors think that, given the social context and the intended audience, murder cum incest would somehow constitute the best calumny? In chapter 18 Silk offers a pertinent comparison for the fusion of an oedipal background with the story of a known miscreant by discussing the case of Judas in medieval literature (p. 191), but one is left wondering whether combining incest and murder is a standard or exceptional form of calumny in the Indian context.

While I readily subscribe to Silk’s arguments for the claim of the centrality of incest in view of how the incest plot in Dharmaruci’s story was used as a pivotal tool in the crafting of Mahādeva’s background, I remain unconvinced as to which specific effect the forgers might have expected in the first place from the inclusion of a sexual part in the calumny, an effect that would not have been achieved by the three sins of immediate retribution.

*Riven by Lust* successfully achieves its purpose with regard to its two initial orientations, namely, the unveiling and analysis of the process of polemical forgery and the results of that creation, and an evaluation of the contribution of Indian Buddhist evidence to patterns of oedipal mythology in Indian lit-

erature as well as world literature. This evaluation shows, in particular, how contextual distinctions need to be taken seriously. Silk's contextual approach offers a pertinent way for looking at narratives by embedding them within a social context and a literary web. *Riven by Lust* greatly enhances our knowledge of these various aspects by its sharp analyses of the material and its detailed comparisons across religious and cultural boundaries, which highlight contextual specificities. Silk further meets the challenge of combining erudition and command of the material with a fine story-telling skill and a fluent style that will make his arguments accessible to a broad readership. Silk's book will hold the reader's attention, not just because it deals with sexual perversions! By calling in the resources of comparative literary studies, narratology, history, argumentation theory, and psychology, Silk has produced a remarkable study of texts-in-context and provided an inspiring model for tackling historical narratives.

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*Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion*. By MARTIN D. STRINGER. (Continuum Advances in Religious Studies), London/New York: Continuum, 2008. 128 pp. ISBN-10: 0-8264-9978-3 (hbk.) ISBN-13: 978-0-8264-9978-3 (hbk.).

What is the elementary form of religious life? According to M.D. Stringer, anthropologist and professor in Liturgical and Congregational Studies at the University of Birmingham, UK, it is “chatting to gran at her grave.” Stringer has written a book in which he goes far in putting Edward B. Tylor’s animistic theory of religion, presented in *Primitive Culture*, 1871, at the centre of the study of religion — minus evolutionary framework, exotic examples and idea of “survivals.”

Stringer has previously written two monographs about Christian worship, *On the Perception of Worship: The Ethnography of Worship in Four Christian Congregations in Manchester* (1999) and *A Sociological History of Christian Worship* (2005). According to Stringer the different types of religious elements like ancestor cults, spirits, and various forms of gods may exist simultaneously in ancient as well as contemporary societies (“Rethinking animism: thoughts from the infancy of our discipline,” *J. Roy. Anthr. Inst.* 5, 4 (1999), 541–556). Human societies relate to the non-empirical at many different levels, but as long as a society is dominated by one tradition like Christianity this is perhaps not so easy to see. When the dominance is no longer there, a wider variety of discourses at different levels come into play. Experiences of angels, visitations of the dead, the use of crystals and myths regarding aliens from other planets are examples. The book under review elaborates these views.

In *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion* Stringer claims that all contemporary definitions of religion within the social sciences have three features in common: “they treat religion as a unified object; they assume that religion is associated with the transcendent; and they see religion as fundamentally transformative for the individual and/or society.” (p. 5). All of these features are associated with Protestant theology. Stringer suggests that this is still the primary model of most scholarship on religion today. He wants instead to draw on empirical studies of ordinary people and everyday life, see what counts as religion and explore the role of the “non-empirical” in the lives of people. Stringer uses an ethnographic approach and presents studies either undertaken by himself or by his students of people chatting to the dead in graveyards and kitchens. By means of this material he discusses belief and considers the unity of religion (chapter 3); focuses on sacred space and the question of transcendence in religion (chapter 4); and discusses “narratives of the non-empirical” (chapter 5). In chapter 6 he asks if his model of religion is

specifically gendered before he in the final chapter 7 raises the question if it is possible to present a new definition of religion.

Stringer makes the observation that people can hold any number of contradictory beliefs. He applies this insight combined with Dan Sperber's view that symbolic statements are used to cope with irrational situations where empirical statements do not make sense. According to Stringer, for most ordinary people in England religion in the form of an encounter with the non-empirical is situational and often contradictory (p. 51).

In the last chapter Stringer suggests "that the kind of religion, the particular form of engagement with the non-empirical, that I have been outlining can in some ways be regarded as the most 'elementary' or 'elemental' form of religion, the ground upon which all other forms are built" (p. 102). By "elementary" form of religion Stringer means "that it is probably the most widespread and most common form of religion, the form of religion to which human beings revert when all other forms collapse" (p. 101). Talking to one's grandmother on the grave is accordingly not "residual" religion, something left over when "real" religion is removed, but "fundamental" religion or "in Durkheim's language, 'elementary'" religion. Stringer claims that he has only explored one of the many different layers of religion that exist in England today. His radical point is that this is the base layer of the wider structure of religion and he asks: "Is the phenomenon I have been exploring in this book, therefore, simply the animistic layer of the wider contemporary English religious system?" (p. 105) Stringer then highlights three elements in the base layer, "the situational, unsystematic nature of belief; an intimate association with the non-empirical; and an attempt to respond to pragmatic questions concerned with daily life and coping with everyday problems" (p. 108).

In this book Stringer turns religion away from the elite's sophisticated systematic theologies, which, according to him, are accepted only by a minority (p. 114), to the personal and unsystematic practices of beliefs of the non-elite. He distinguishes between what he calls "coping religion" and "transforming religion." Coping religion is what people turn to in order to get on with their lives while transforming religion is about a change of lifestyle connected to a belief in an afterlife as seen, for instance, in the world religions. The first type is, according to Stringer, closer to the elementary forms ("the form of religion to which humans revert when all other forms collapse," cf. above) than the second type. This is a fascinating thought and in several ways plausible. On the other hand when religion came more clearly into view in the third millennium BCE with the rise of literate cultures in Egypt and Mesopotamia, it was from the beginning intimately connected with power and palaces. The oldest historical religions stood in the middle of the great projects of building cities.

It may very well be that humans established societies and communicated with superhuman beings on behalf of those societies as far back as they have communicated with superhuman beings, and that the different layers and discourses of religion consist in an interchange and dialectic between the communication of the individual and the communication of the state/city/group with the non-empirical. In other words, it seems a likely possibility that what Stringer labels “coping religion” and what could be called “ruling religion” have always existed together. However, we are now moving into the territory of what Evans-Pritchard correctly and with reference to Rudyard Kipling characterized as “just-so” stories when he described the old tales about the origin of the religion told by the founding fathers of the academic study of religion in the 19th century.

*Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion* has several strengths. I will mention two. One is the interesting ethnography it offers of people in England today. It raises several questions, for instance: How common is it that people talk to dead relatives (or similar forms of coping religion) and how significant is this conversation? These are questions that are possible to investigate further.

The second strength, as I see it, is that this short book opens up the possibility to see the contemporary situation as broadly comparable to the religious situation in other places and at other times, and not as something special or atypical — as is often the case. Stringer metaphorically speaking puts secularization in brackets and makes possible a grand comparative project that includes the contemporary religious situation in Britain and other Western countries. The book is also about defining religion. One could ask if Stringer has drawn the line too sharply between religion and what is not religion. How this division is made and how religion is theoretically described will of course always determine the result of an analysis.

The book under review is part of a series, *Continuum Advances in Religious Studies*. The goal of the series is to offer “original reflections on theory and method in the study of religions, and demonstrate new approaches to the way religious traditions are studied and presented.” In a series of this kind, theoretical insights will also need to be applied to actual cases. This is what Stringer has done in this engaging, neo-Tylorean study of contemporary Western religious ethnography.

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